

Historical Evolution of the Office of Deputy Minister  
in British Columbia Educational Policymaking  
1919 - 1945: The Career of Samuel John Willis.

by

VALERIE MARY EVELYN GILES

M.A., Simon Fraser University, 1983

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Social and Educational Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1993

©VALERIE MARY EVELYN GILES, 1993

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Social and Educational Studies  
The University of British Columbia  
2044 Lower Mall  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6T 1W5

Date: September 1993

## Abstract

S.J. Willis was British Columbia's longest-serving Deputy Minister. Between 1919 and 1945 he influenced directly the policies and procedures of the province's educational enterprise.

Willis assumed a primary role in policy-making. It was to Willis that the Ministers, school inspectors, teachers and members of the public made known their suggestions and complaints. Although he continued to manage the Department with a high degree of central authority, he was more inclusive of teachers and trustees in policy-making than were his predecessors. His ingenuity in this respect is one of the central themes of this thesis.

Willis set the tone for dealings with the Department. Public perceptions of the Department, and those of teachers in the field, were determined largely by their dealings with the Deputy. He managed day-to-day operations while Ministers tended political relationships and participated in government.

As Deputy Minister, Willis provided political advice to his ministers, thus taking responsibility for controversial issues as an ordinary duty. All the while, Willis showed he understood the scope and limitations of his powers. He was careful to support the politicians and governments he served without assuming the mantle of elected representatives. The record of his career exemplifies that of the traditional civil servant.

This study concludes that Willis' bureaucratic legacy can be instructive to contemporary government officials and suggests that the Deputy performs an important function in providing continuity between changing governments and Ministers.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b>	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>Dedication</b>	vi

### **CHAPTER 1 A Deputy Minister: Introduction**

Introduction	1
Willis' family background and outlook	3
Willis' career progression to 1919	10
Thematic outline	19

### **CHAPTER 2 State of the School System and Department in 1919**

<u>The School System</u>	
Physical and human resources	23
The budget	27
<u>The Department</u>	
The Superintendent's duties	27
Borrowed traditions from other systems	30
The Ontario heritage	32
The American experience and influence	37
British traditions of civil service	41
Alexander Robinson's organizational legacy	46

### **CHAPTER 3 Managing a Traditional System, 1919 - 1925**

Changes in the social order, 1919 - early 1920s	54
Willis' administrative style	59
Relationships with teachers	64
The first teacher strikes in Canada	68
The B.C.T.F.'s professional interests	71
Willis' view of teachers in the 1920s	72
The quality of schooling	76
Curriculum	78
Rural conditions	81

## **CHAPTER 4 Social and Educational Change, 1925 - 1939**

The meaning of Progressive Education	86
The Putman-Weir Report	91
Willis' response to the Putman-Weir Report	96
Coping with Progressive Education	105

## **CHAPTER 5 Struggling Schools: The Depression Years, 1930 - 1938**

Background to the Depression	110
The Kidd Report	114
Weir becomes Minister: Deputy's role declines	120
The King Report	125
Pursuit of educational equity	133
Towards an equalized salary scale	137
The Peace River experiment and school consolidation	139
The 1937 reform and its background	146

## **CHAPTER 6 The War Years: 1939 - 1945**

The politics of war	149
Administration during the war years	152
Teachers' salaries	160
Consolidation of school districts	166
Willis and the B.C.T.F.	170
Accepting Progressivism	172

## **CHAPTER 7 Leaving Office: The Willis Legacy**

Circumstances at retirement	177
The office of Deputy Minister	185

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	191
---------------------	-----

## Acknowledgements

I would like to pay tribute to the people who helped me arrive at this stage in my academic career.

First, and foremost, to my research supervisor, Dr. Bill Bruneau, for his excellent guidance and for all the time he invested in me. I join a long list of graduate students who speak of him in superlatives. There could not be a more dedicated teacher.

It was my good fortune to have advisors who took special interest in this work. Dr. Jean Barman pointed the way for conducting the research. Dr. Thomas Fleming reworked the organization of this thesis into a more logical and readable form. Dr. Neil Sutherland imparted advice about style and theme which was invaluable in telling the story. All of them gave me encouragement and support beyond measure.

For his continuing interest, and for recruiting me into the Policy Studies programme, I would especially like to thank Dr. John Calam.

The inspiration for this topic came from Dr. Norman Robinson, who encouraged me to study the influence of the Deputy Minister as an extension of my Master's thesis work on British Columbia Education Ministers.

The person who originally inspired me to want a Ph.D. is Dr. Liam Finn. For his affectionate teaching of life's important lessons, I am truly grateful.

Long ago, I was given some good advice by Madeleine Basford. She reminded me that if I planned to go on to graduate school, I must never lose the discipline of studying.

This thesis is produced on paper and on computer disk in deference to my friend, Frank Ogden. As a futurist, he respects my interest in the past, but forces me to anticipate the exciting changes ahead as the world hurtles through the Information Age.

And I would also like to remember all my other friends for understanding that the work of thesis writing precluded companionship. At last, I am ready to join in.

*This thesis is dedicated  
to the memory of  
my father  
Albert James Thompson Giles  
1921 - 1989*

## Chapter 1

### A Deputy Minister: Introduction

*Yesterday the sands ran out for Dr. Willis.<sup>1</sup>*

A Victoria Daily Times editorial thus bade a poetic farewell to the former Deputy Minister, Superintendent, principal, and teacher who had contributed more than a half-century of service to education. Samuel John Willis died after a short illness on April 24, 1947 in Victoria's St. Joseph's Hospital. The family funeral, held the following Monday on a drizzly spring day, saw the Metropolitan United Church packed to the doors. The high regard for Dr. Willis was evidenced by the stature of his mourners. Those paying tribute included the province's Premier and leading educationists. Willis, who had an unassuming character and manner, would have been overwhelmed by the distinction accorded him. Honorary pallbearers came from the political elite of the day: Premier John Hart, Victoria Mayor Percy George, Education Minister George Weir, Deputy Education Minister Frank Fairey, University of British Columbia President Norman MacKenzie, and University of British Columbia professors Daniel Buchanan, Lemuel Robertson, Garnet C. Sedgewick, Maxwell Cameron, Frederick Wood, and C.B. Wood. His flower-banked casket was carried by old friends: Ralph Matthews of the Kiwanis Club; C.B. Deaville of the Masonic Order; Fred M. McGregor, Percy B. Scurrah, and Harold L. Campbell of the Department of Education and Dr. J.M. Ewing, Victoria College Principal. It was a fine and fitting tribute.

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 25 April 1947, p. 4.



## Chapter 1

Samuel John Willis was the most senior government employee concerned with education in British Columbia from 1919 to 1945. Willis' career, as attendance at his funeral suggested, was inextricably bound to the Department of Education and the government of British Columbia. The major events of his 26-year administration, reconstructed from personal files, Department of Education records, excerpts from speeches, and newspaper accounts, document his role as one of the chief architects and stewards of British Columbia's modern school system.

This study begins when functions later taken up by the Deputy Minister were still handled by the province's Superintendent of Schools. Superintendents were required to obtain and to provide teaching supplies, to take responsibility for the budget, to oversee inspection, to organize Teachers' Institutes, to grant certificates of qualification, and to produce an annual report. During Willis' tenure the office acquired the title "Deputy Minister." S.J. Willis was appointed Superintendent of Education November 3, 1919 and his title was changed to *Superintendent and Deputy Minister* while he served. An announcement was made to the press in 1928,<sup>2</sup> but the first official use of the title *Deputy Minister* in British Columbia occurred in the 1931-32 school year. This dual title continued to 1965 when the functions were changed. A separate Superintendent was appointed to deal with services in the field.

The statutory provisions for appointment of the Deputy Minister are contained in the Civil Service Act which provides: "A Deputy Minister shall be a Civil Servant under the provision of this Act and shall hold office during pleasure." The actual responsibilities of the position are described in the Act as: "It is the duty of the Deputy Minister of each department, as he has the authority, subject to the Minister, to oversee and direct the other employees in the department and to report as to their efficiency. He has the general

<sup>2</sup> The Star, 29 December 1928, p. 9.

supervision of the business of the department and such other powers and duties as are assigned to him by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council or by Statute."<sup>3</sup> By tracing Willis' career, this study also documents the historical evolution of the office of Deputy Minister in British Columbia educational policymaking.

## **WILLIS' FAMILY BACKGROUND AND OUTLOOK**

The grandchild of British immigrants, Samuel John Willis was born July 28, 1877 in Kingston, Prince Edward Island, to Charles and Elizabeth Willis, the fourth of their eight children. Samuel Willis grew up in a farming family with six brothers and one sister. The family registered as Methodist at the 1881 census.<sup>4</sup> Samuel Willis received the classical, liberal education *de rigueur* at the time for prosperous families with aspirations for their children beyond achieving basic literacy. He enrolled at Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown, a non-sectarian Protestant college originally called the Central Academy (created by royal charter in 1836) and known after 1860 as Prince of Wales College.<sup>5</sup>

Prince of Wales College was characterized as "classical" and held a reputation for high standards of academic excellence. There, Willis proved to be a brilliant student, graduating at the head of his class and winning the gold medal for scholarship.<sup>6</sup> He began

---

<sup>3</sup> R.S.B.C. 1960, C. 56 Section 10 (2) and Section 12.

<sup>4</sup> Census of Canada, 1881. Province of Prince Edward Island, District No. 2, Queen's County, Township No. 31, p. 3. and Census of Canada, 1891. Province of Prince Edward Island, District No. 135, Queen's County, Township No. 31, Division No. 2, pp. 11-12. (1881 and 1891 census records are in manuscript form.)

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of the history, see Sister Mary Olga McKenna's chapter, "Higher Education in Transition" in The Garden Transformed, eds. V. Smitheram et al. (Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1982).

## Chapter 1

his career as a teacher in a red-brick, one-room country school in his native Prince Edward Island where he taught for two years before entering McGill in 1897. He graduated in 1900, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Classics with first class honours, winning yet another scholarship medal. He then taught for a short time at Montreal High School.

Steeped in the classics, Willis brought to his teaching and administration work an awareness of the historical bases of government and educational practice. In the nineteenth century, educated Canadians generally believed a study of the classics provided the best opportunity to understand contemporary issues. Those notions about classical training were linked to the rise of bureaucratic traditions in Europe and later in eastern North America.

Between 1830 and 1950, in much of the English-speaking world, political leaders and high civil servants held that classical training prepared its students to apply insights and knowledge of philosophical and social foundations to the future. Educational leaders during much of that period tended to be classicists and religiously-minded. Two examples of such leaders were the architect of the Ontario system, Egerton Ryerson, and McGill's Principal, Sir William Peterson, who influenced those schooled in their institutions.<sup>7</sup> Like other school or public leaders of his time, Willis was likely raised with this awareness about preparation for public service. Willis' classical education also had important implications for career advancement. Upward progression in the British Civil Service favoured the classicists, who tended to be promoted more rapidly than their contemporaries schooled in other disciplines.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Victoria Daily Times*, 24 March 1908, p. 1. The facts of Willis' educational background were reported in support of his appointment as Principal of Victoria High School by the Victoria School Board trustees.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh MacLennan, *McGill: The Story of a University* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), p. 75.

## Chapter 1

As Symonds noted, it was mainly Oxford men who rose to the highest ranks in service to the British Empire, and most of them had read classics. Proponents of classics held that the study of the Greats was "the best possible preparation for a political or administrative career because it taught good judgment."<sup>8</sup> Symonds described the social influence an Oxford education had on the world -- including late- nineteenth-century Canada. He asserted that the experience was likely to be manifested in emphasis on "character, Christian principles and loyalty to Empire."<sup>9</sup> Certainly in the British Columbian educational bureaucracy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, classicists were prominent among holders of senior positions in the hierarchy. Willis' social and educational background fit neatly with the climate surviving in the British Columbia Civil Service where he found himself in the company of other Empire Loyalists and classicists. Examples include Willis' predecessor as Superintendent, Alexander Robinson, and University of British Columbia Professor and Head of Classics, Lemuel Robertson.

Willis' credential as a practicing Protestant churchgoer further helped him fit comfortably amongst his fellows in the Department. Churchmen -- or rather observant members of various Protestant denominations -- were well represented in the provincial educational bureaucracy around the time of Willis' appointment in 1919. Willis had been raised a Methodist. The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches came together on June 10, 1925 to establish the United Church of Canada.<sup>10</sup> Although opposition to the union was evident in all the denominations, Willis was among those who

---

<sup>8</sup> Richard Symonds, Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause? (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986), p. 1. See especially Chapter 2, "Prophets, Classics and Philosopher Kings."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> N. Keith Clifford, The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985), p. 1.

## Chapter 1

transferred allegiance.<sup>11</sup> He became a prominent member of the Metropolitan United Church in Victoria. His predecessor, Alexander Robinson, was an Anglican as was Premier Tolmie and the Education Ministers Willis served -- Joshua Hinchliffe and Harry Perry.<sup>12</sup>

Church affiliation, particularly in the major Protestant denominations, was no accident amongst educationists.<sup>13</sup> The reform spirit was strong within both churches and the educational bureaucracy. Their ultimate goal of making a better society was a shared one. The social gospel movement in evidence at century's turn that lasted into the 1930s in Europe and North America was described by Smillie as a means of applying the Christian gospel to life. He saw it as a movement "optimistic about the reconstruction of society based on democratic Christian principles. It assumed that religious and secular thought was involved in an interdependent relationship."<sup>14</sup>

As someone born in the highpoint of the Victorian age, Willis could not help but be shaped by the strong moral reform movement characteristic of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. One notable example of education and religion working together for

---

<sup>11</sup> For further reference see Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> The Reverend Canon C.W. Downer, an Anglican clergyman, officiated at Robinson's funeral on April 12th, 1952 at the McCall Bros. Funeral Home in Victoria. Joshua Hinchliffe was a retired Canon of the Anglican Church when he became Education Minister in 1928. See a discussion of religious influence in S.W. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia (Sidney: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969), p. 235.

<sup>13</sup> Note that University of Toronto President Falconer was Presbyterian but fought hard for and then embraced the United Church of Canada formed in 1925. James G. Brown was a well-known Methodist pastor at Ryerson Church in Vancouver and became Principal of Union Theological College at U.B.C. in 1926. Information obtained by W. A. Bruneau in an interview with D.G. Brown (son of James Brown), February 5, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin G. Smillie, "The Social Gospel in Canada: A Theological Critique," in The Social Gospel in Canada, ed. Richard Allen (Regina: University of Regina, 1975), p. 318.

moral reform was the strong support Methodists gave to the temperance movement. The cause was taken up in earnest by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which was active in British Columbia, and focussed on influencing the school environment. Willis supported their work and urged the school trustees to support their cause. Willis eventually carried the banner so far as to draft resolutions such as the one sent to the Nanaimo trustees "deploring the increase in drinking and urging intensive instruction on the matter in the high schools."<sup>15</sup> These women also sought to make schools clean, properly ventilated and well-lit. They encouraged establishment of school gardens and provision of hot lunches for needy children. Their stated purpose was to establish a Christian world order -- one which was progressive in outlook, and ultimately humane.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the social gospellers did influence the government and society of their era. Allen assessed their influence as an all-pervasive and broad-based social phenomenon:

In church and in secular society, in rural and urban life, in municipality and province, and progressively in federal politics, reformers were attempting the awesome task of reshaping Canadian society. When their work was done, both the structures and social outlook of Canada were remarkably altered.<sup>17</sup>

Willis' views were similar to those of his contemporary, Robert Falconer, who was then University of Toronto President. Falconer was described by his biographer as someone for whom a unifying thread was "Christian idealism that was flexible enough to accommodate other strands of truth."<sup>18</sup> Throughout his long and distinguished career, Willis exhorted students to aspire to solid character building, responsible citizenship and a deep sense of duty and loyalty. By doing so, he lent strong support to Christian idealism.

<sup>15</sup> The Vancouver Province, 14 January 1943, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin G. Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel: Church Protest on the Prairies (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991), pp. 101-107.

<sup>17</sup> Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> James G. Greenlee, Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), Preface, p. xii.

## Chapter 1

For Willis, this duty was based in a firm commitment to these values. Willis addressed these themes and took them to heart, applying first to himself the high standards he hoped to cultivate through the school system. An example of the language he used is contained in his speech to the student body of Victoria High School on the occasion of the school's twentieth anniversary, May 8, 1934. He spoke about integrity, consideration for one's fellow man, and the courage and determination characteristic of the British race.<sup>19</sup> He was open about expressing his code of conduct and loyalty to Christian values. Furthermore, he applied them in conducting his personal life and in his professional relationships.

Willis' outlook was in keeping with the social character of the British Columbia Department of Education's men as described by Fleming.<sup>20</sup> The Department's recruitment practices were consistent in the tendency to gravitate towards a certain type of individual. They tended to be known to each other as former university classmates or fellow Maritimers, or had regimental connections from military service.<sup>21</sup> Around 1900, the exodus from the Maritimes became a subject of comment among Canadian newspaper editorialists. Greenlee observed that "people were leaving the Maritimes for points west in numbers sufficiently large to attract considerable comment from the worried press."<sup>22</sup> Halifax papers began to feature regular articles on the subject of westward migration in the last half of 1906.

---

<sup>19</sup> The Daily Colonist, 9 May 1934, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," in Schools In The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, eds. Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986), pp. 290-29. Fleming notes that many administrators in B.C.'s education system prior to 1929 had been born and educated in the Maritimes, Ontario and the British Isles.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>22</sup> Greenlee, Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography, p. 89.

In the period immediately preceding Willis' appointment, the educational hierarchy was comprised of a group of classically-trained men, many of whom hailed from the Maritimes, were educated in central Canadian universities, and then joined the westward movement attracted by opportunities opening up in British Columbia. Once here, this clique became established in public education, particularly in the senior management positions. Hiring of classmates, former students or proteges became the norm and helped to solidify the "corporate culture" of the fledgling Department.<sup>23</sup> This was a group of men who were known to each other and who shared a common cluster of values and philosophies concerning schooling, along with ideas about how it should be managed. Each took his job very seriously, for as Fleming puts it, "For many, the job became the most important thing in their lives."<sup>24</sup>

Allegiance to the notion of central authority was important in and to the Department. There was, therefore, consistency in the selection of officials who were prepared to serve the department and to give their allegiance.<sup>25</sup> Willis performed his duties as a civil servant not only according to his personal style, but also under the constraints of the conventions and influences of the times.

---

<sup>23</sup> This was reflected as common knowledge by historians John Calam and Peter W. Smith and in the recollections of former school Inspector Stewart Graham and former B.C.T.F. President Bernard Gillie in interviews with the author.

<sup>24</sup> Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field'," p. 290.

<sup>25</sup> Willis' background differed in that he had not done military service. Typically, leaders in British Columbia's educational civil service from 1918 to about 1950 had command experience in the First or Second World War, according to the Department's Field Services Division card file on field personnel. At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Willis would have been 37 years old-- well above the typical recruiting age of 18 to 25 years.



## WILLIS' CAREER PROGRESSION TO 1919

Like his fellow educationists Alexander Robinson, J.D. MacLean, Lemuel Robertson and virtually all other British Columbian school leaders before 1925, Willis had come west to establish his career.<sup>26</sup> Smith resorted to a bit of hyperbole in describing Willis' turn-of-the-century move as one which was "part of an invading army of Prince Edward Islanders, who virtually controlled Education in British Columbia for several decades."<sup>27</sup> Historians such as Barman, Calam, Fleming and others have illustrated in various ways the eastern-born connection.<sup>28</sup> Barman describes this settlement pattern as a form of "chain migration" where family and friends of an adventurous person would be induced to follow. In the case of teachers, they were also attracted by economic opportunity. "Lured by much higher salaries in the west ... many Maritimers came out to teach in British Columbia's fledgling schools."<sup>29</sup>

Willis followed his friend Lemuel Robertson to British Columbia in 1900, and accepted a teaching position at the Boys' Central School in Victoria. He left after only one year to join the staff at Victoria High School. That school planned to expand into higher learning. In order to qualify as an accredited programme of studies, the Victoria School

<sup>26</sup> All three began careers in British Columbia as school teachers. Robertson helped found the University of British Columbia and served as the first Head of Classics. MacLean served as Minister of Education from 1916-1928 and as Premier during his last year of office.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Lawson Smith, Come Give a Cheer: One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976 (Victoria: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations Committee, 1976), p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> For example, refer to discussions in Jean Barman, The West Beyond The West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); John Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991); and Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field'," pp. 285-303.

<sup>29</sup> Barman, The West Beyond The West, p. 130.

Board had applied to McGill University seeking affiliate status for Victoria High School. After receiving authority to offer first year Arts courses, "Victoria College" commenced in the fall of 1903 with seven students, holding classes in the high school, with Edward B. Paul as Principal and Willis as one of the first faculty members.<sup>30</sup>

Willis was offered a one-year lectureship at McGill University in 1905. The offer had not been solicited by Willis, but came in recognition of his excellent academic record.<sup>31</sup> The offer included an opportunity to do post-graduate work. Willis wanted to accept the position, which was an honour similar to obtaining a "limited fellowship" at one of the Oxbridge colleges. But he could do so only if leave were arranged with the Victoria School Board from September 1, 1905 to May 1, 1906. This would have permitted him to work for Victoria High School the preceding August and during May and June, "as otherwise the monetary sacrifices would have been too great."<sup>32</sup>

At their June meeting, the school board decided to grant him leave only for the period beginning in August 1905 and ending in June 1906. The decision caused Willis to

---

<sup>30</sup> For so small a group -- seven students and a five member staff -- to earn affiliation status as a college of a well-established university as McGill was unusual. One author's opinion is that two of McGill's star pupils were on the staff, Samuel Willis and Rosalind Watson, gold medalists of 1900 and 1895 respectively. See Smith, *Come Give a Cheer*, p. 40. Calam provides evidence of an even stronger connection in a note explaining how Willis was known to Lemuel Robertson. "A fellow New Brunswicker, Robertson had met Willis at McGill where they both honoured in Classics. Later, Robertson had become professor of Classics at Vancouver College and 'while on a year's study leave at McGill' suggested to Principal Peterson that, with adequate funding, Vancouver College could become 'a full-fledged college of McGill University.' McGill agreed. Sir William Macdonald promised \$5,000 for three years, and in 1906, the British Columbia legislature passed enabling legislation." Noted in Calam, ed., *Alex Lord's British Columbia*, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> *The Victoria Times*, 24 March 1908, p. 1. Evidence of Willis' academic reputation is contained in a career summary on the occasion of his appointment as Principal of Victoria High School.

<sup>32</sup> *The Colonist*, 30 June 1905, p. 5. Remark attributed to Willis. This is the only source of information available about the offer. McGill University has no record of it, and the Victoria School Board reports that they have no records extant for 1905.

turn down the McGill posting. Although the Victoria School Board minutes from 1905 have not survived, there is a strong possibility that the Board feared losing him to McGill. He was an extremely well-liked teacher whose administrative ability the Board had quickly recognized. Later that year, on December 27, when Willis married Victoria teacher Elinor Nisbet, The Colonist published a wedding announcement describing Willis as "one of the most popular teachers of this city" and listing the tokens of regard bestowed upon the couple by fellow teachers and students.<sup>33</sup>

After teaching at Victoria High School for seven years, Willis was appointed to succeed Edward B. Paul as Principal in 1908. He was the unanimous choice of the trustees, and the only applicant considered. The Board approved its decision by recording the explanatory comment concerning "his long experience in educational work and his success therein weighing strongly with the trustees."<sup>34</sup> Alex Lord remembered the reputation Willis earned as a teacher at Victoria High. He described how Willis, after assuming the principalship, took the school's reputation to new heights. Lord recalled, "Under his wise and able leadership over the next five years, no school in the province was more highly regarded."<sup>35</sup> Paul was promoted to City Superintendent of Schools. In the 1908-09 Annual Report, Paul lauded Willis' first year as Principal:

On the whole, the results of the work of the College and High School have been very encouraging. Principal Willis and the teaching staff of the school are to be congratulated on its efficiency and on the high reputation which, largely through their energy, the Victoria High School has acquired at the McGill University.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> The Colonist, 29 December 1905, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> The Colonist, 24 March 1908, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> A.R. Lord on S.J. Willis, Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1908-09 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1909), p. A33. Willis served as Principal until 1916.

## Chapter 1

Changing economic conditions in British Columbia were about to influence the course of Willis' career. In the years just before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, a severe depression hit throughout the province. Declining fortunes were perhaps most evident in Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria where 60 per cent of the population lived. With Canada's entry into the war in 1914, public attention focussed on supporting the Canadian troops in Europe. Provincial politicians exhorted the public to contribute to the war effort by belt-tightening and by accepting rationing. Wartime shortages eroded the provincial tax base and directly affected school board budgets. Among the first to decide to cut salaries was the Victoria School Board.<sup>37</sup> When the Victoria School Board met on January 22, 1915 Willis and five other teachers put up a spirited defense of their case for leaving salaries intact. They were told that they should think of the Board's budget difficulties, reconsider the matter, and report again to the Board the following week. This same meeting determined that any vacant teaching positions were to be filled with candidates willing to accept the minimum salary. At the January 27, 1915 meeting the Victoria School Board set in place its policy of a ten per cent reduction of all school salaries. The minutes record:

It was unanimously agreed that a sum representing at least 10% of the total teachers' annual salaries, based on the salaries of the teachers as they existed in December 1914, must be taken off the estimate in order to meet the exigency of the present financial situation.<sup>38</sup>

Just prior to consideration of the budget estimates, a delegation from the Victoria Teachers' Institute, led by Willis as President, attempted to sway the Board against cutting teachers' salaries. Willis presented the association's unanimous resolution that "The

---

<sup>37</sup> A.R. Lord on S.J. Willis, Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia, p. 125. "Money was scarce, tax collections were poor, and, following the acceptable policy of the day, the school Board cut salaries, also early and hard."

<sup>38</sup> Victoria School Board, Minutes of Meeting, 27 January 1915, p. S23.

## Chapter 1

Teachers are opposed to any refund of their salaries to the Board on principle."<sup>39</sup> Their plea was unsuccessful. Although Willis possessed the fortitude and organizational capacity to become a union activist, he was evidently not drawn to such a role. Nevertheless, as an administrator he remained sympathetic to teachers. Their regard for him, as expressed through the British Columbia Teachers' Federation correspondence and minutes, bear witness to mutual respect.<sup>40</sup>

The salary cuts considered at subsequent meetings were across the board -- and included high school teachers, janitors and office staff. All experienced a ten per cent salary reduction.<sup>41</sup> The decision produced teacher resignations. Many good teachers left Willis' school -- some to enlist in the armed services. As the school declined in stature, others sought employment with the new University of British Columbia (U.B.C.) With the establishment of the university, Victoria College lost its McGill affiliation and could no longer offer college-level courses. It became increasingly difficult to replace the teaching staff who were resigning to teach at U.B.C.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes and the B.C.T.F. publication, the B.C. Teacher, mention numerous times "cordial" meetings between Willis and B.C.T.F. delegations. The B.C.T.F. consistently described Willis as "sincere" and "fair". Similar language was summoned up in their editorial tribute upon his passing. "Privileged indeed were those whose fortune it was to have been associated in any capacity with him. His sympathetic understanding and careful consideration of the many educational problems brought to him by federation officers on various occasions has improved materially the status of the teaching profession in this province." B.C. Teacher, 26, 8, (May-June, 1947): 322.

<sup>41</sup> Victoria School Board, Minutes of Meeting, 29 January 1915, p. S27.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, Come Give a Cheer, p. 42.

## Chapter 1

In 1916, Willis himself reluctantly made the same move. He accepted a teaching position just one year after U.B.C. began operation in 1915 and served there for two years.<sup>43</sup> A contemporary, A.R. Lord, recalled:

Each term Willis saw the standing and tone of his school drop a little lower until, in something approaching despair, he accepted a position which he had declined a year or two earlier, becoming in September 1916 [associate] professor of classics at U.B.C. under his old friend Lemuel Robertson.<sup>44</sup>

Willis was popular as a Latin professor. The 1916-17 U.B.C. Annual described him as kind and tolerant:

Formerly most of us knew Mr. Willis only from his signature on our High School certificates. This term, however, we who desire to lisp in Latin numbers have been given the opportunity of forming a more intimate acquaintance with him. Those who take lectures under him know him as a man at once just and considerate, and if wisely exacting, only the more unsparing of his own efforts.<sup>45</sup>

In 1918, Willis' educational career took an important turn. The Vancouver School Board called for an inquiry into the efficiency of the city's school system. The purpose was mainly to investigate reported problems in the management of King Edward High School. Parents and some teachers were dissatisfied with the school's first principal, Stanley W. Mathews. Although he had served since 1909, after nine years in office, complaints began to reach the Vancouver School Board. Staff morale was low, with teachers divided into cliques. Confidence in the principal was lost. Mathews managed to

---

<sup>43</sup> University of British Columbia, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Governors, 11 May 1916. Vol. 3, p. 385. Willis was appointed for three years at \$2,750.00 per annum, effective July 1, 1916, replacing retiring professor Mr. Kemp. The term and salary paid Willis was identical to that offered the year before to Lemuel Robertson.

<sup>44</sup> A.R. Lord on S.J. Willis, Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia, p. 125. Lemuel Robertson was appointed Head of the Classics Department effective April 1, 1920, without term. U.B.C. Board of Governors' minutes. Vol. 5, p. 741.

<sup>45</sup> U.B.C. Annual 1916-17, Appointments in the Faculty and Staff, p. 23.

## Chapter 1

contribute to his own undoing. When the investigation began, he gave conflicting reports to the inquiry commissioners from those he gave to the school board.<sup>46</sup>

The inquiry commissioners were the Reverend Principal W.H. Vance of the Anglican College and the Reverend Principal John Mackay of Westminster Hall. Appointed by the Vancouver School Board, they concluded that Mathews "was not capable of holding the office of principal of such an important institution." Specifically, Mathews "had no proper grasp of the inter-relation of one department to another, and though he had a splendid staff, was not producing satisfactory results." Commissioner Vance made blunt and damaging statements to the Vancouver School Board concerning Principal Mathews. In an account of the meeting published the following day, it was reported that Vance declared that the Principal "had a tremendous grasp of details, but they were details that were not material" and that he "did not seem 'big enough for the job'."<sup>47</sup> Mathews' primary problem was an inability to manage his school and in particular to provide leadership to the teachers. The inquiry's findings set up the expectation that a singular individual had to be found to take over the principalship of the school. The Commissioners' immediate solution was a drastic one, calling for the resignation of not only the Principal, but of the entire staff. Their reasoning was that the new Principal should be free to appoint the staff, with the assumption that better assignments could be made in re-engaging most of the teachers.

---

<sup>46</sup> British Columbia Archives and Records Service (hereafter BCARS), GR 0467 Vol. 1 (1903-1919), pp. 205 - 206. "Would Ask King Edward Staff To File Resignation," published 12 February 1918 in The Daily Province.

<sup>47</sup> BCARS, GR 0467 Volume 1 (1903-1919), Clipping Book pp. 205-206. Article published in Vancouver World 12 February 1918, "Principal and Entire Staff Should Resign."

## Chapter 1

The Vancouver School Board now faced the task of finding a new Principal for the province's largest high school. Although the trustees wanted to be fair about promoting teachers within their district as opportunities came available, they eventually agreed that a strong outside appointment would be the best choice. At the June 18, 1918 meeting, Trustee Long spoke in favour of Willis several times, and eventually made a formal suggestion that Willis be asked to apply.<sup>48</sup> Willis had been highly regarded in education circles, his reputation being established first as Principal of Victoria High School and then as a popular faculty member at U.B.C. Because Willis was known as an excellent teacher and administrator, the Vancouver school trustees were confident that he was a person of suitable stature and ability to assume the principalship of King Edward High School. Trustee Lang assured the Board that "A number of leading men here have told me that Mr. Willis was probably the best type of man in the Province today for a difficult problem such as we have to face. It is sometimes quite proper for the position to seek the man, rather than the man the position."<sup>49</sup> Trustee Lang read an unsolicited recommendation from U.B.C. Classics head, Robertson, in whose Department Willis was teaching. The board voted at the June 24, 1918 meeting to hire Willis at an annual salary of \$3,600.

Willis was appointed Principal in September 1918 and, in one short year, his reputation at that school was firmly established. His tenure as Principal was cut short when a new challenge was presented to him. The school's historians recorded:

When in November, 1919, he was called upon to assume the position of Superintendent of Education for the Province of British Columbia, his resignation evoked universal regret.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Vancouver School Board, Minutes, 18 June 1918, p. 250.

<sup>49</sup> Vancouver School Board, Minutes, 24 June 1918, p. 269.

<sup>50</sup> History Club of King Edward High School, The First Fifty Years: Vancouver High Schools 1890-1940 (Vancouver: Vancouver School Board, 1940), p. 76.



## Chapter 1

Willis' former colleague, Lemuel Robertson, again played a signal role in the unfolding of Willis' career. It is the stuff of legends, and a good story, how Willis came to be chosen to replace Alexander Robinson as Superintendent of Education. As Inspector Alex R. Lord related in his memoir, a messenger arrived at Robertson's home one evening in mid-September 1919 with a letter from Education Minister J.D. MacLean. It contained the question: "Which of these three<sup>51</sup> would be best as Superintendent of Education? Robertson wrote "S.J. Willis" at the bottom and the messenger returned with the sealed envelope to Victoria.<sup>52</sup> Days later a formal announcement was made to the press about Robinson's retirement and Willis' succession to the position. Inspector Lord commented that the common background shared by Robertson, MacLean and Willis as Prince Edward Islanders, McGill alumni and former British Columbia teachers was "not a negligible factor at a time when most of British Columbia's leaders in education had their origins in the Maritime provinces."<sup>53</sup> Willis and Robertson were Classics colleagues at McGill and became part of the large Maritime contingent who served within the Education Department.

The actual appointment as Superintendent of Education was made by an Order-In-Council passed by the cabinet November 3, 1919 and Willis assumed duties on November 17. The position was *de facto* deputy minister to J.D. MacLean, Education Minister in the Liberal government of Premier John Oliver. The first use of the title "Deputy Minister"

<sup>51</sup> Although the names of the two people on MacLean's list are not known, Alexander Robinson considered that there were three others who were better qualified than was Willis to replace him. See The Victoria Times, 11 November 1919, p. 5 for an indication of who they might have been. The newspaper published Robinson's November 10 letter to Education Minister J.D. MacLean. Robinson listed "Mr. Arthur Sullivan, Senior High School Inspector; Mr. J.W. Gibson, Director of Elementary Agricultural Education; and Mr. J.S. Gordon, Municipal Inspector of Schools" as more acceptable successors to his position.

<sup>52</sup> A.R. Lord on S.J. Willis, Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

would appear in the press with Willis' appointment December 28, 1928 to assist Education Minister Hinchliffe. It was reported "He will carry on the regular duties of superintendent of education as in the past with the added duties that go with the position of deputy minister."<sup>54</sup> The title **Deputy Minister and Superintendent of Education** carried forth in the Department of Education annual reports from 1931-32 on.

## THEMATIC OUTLINE

This thesis examines the Deputy Minister's influence on the generation and implementation of Education Department policies between 1919 and 1945. The extent of Samuel John Willis' opportunity and authority to act was expanded by the force of his own ambition and sense of duty but contained by the reality of government structures and society's expectations respecting education. Although Willis was a creature of his era, a case can also be made that his personality, being the depiction of his organized behaviour, contributed to his performance as Deputy Minister.

The position Willis held as Superintendent and Deputy Minister implied both leadership and authority. In an obvious sense, the Deputy Minister was the creator of convention, not just the embodiment of it. Because the Deputy Minister held the highest ranking civil service office in education, he could directly influence policies and programmes. Rousseau's study of Western Canadian Deputy Ministers during the late 1960s found that the Deputy was responsible for the internal administration and supervision of the Department, exercising powers putatively designated to the Minister.<sup>55</sup> A similar

---

<sup>54</sup> "Dr. S.J. Willis Appointed to Aid Minister: Education Superintendent Promoted Deputy by Government." The Morning Star 29 December 1928, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph G. Rousseau, "Some Aspects of the Role of Selected Deputy Ministers of Education" (M. Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1968).

## Chapter 1

assumption of power is described in Woodrow's research findings on the statutory provisions for authority and power in the British Columbia education system. He argued that "all actions taken by the Deputy Minister are done with the presumed authority of the Minister."<sup>56</sup> But was this always so? This study demonstrates how far the aura of the Deputy's influence reached under Willis, and argues that it was his *consolidation* of the office's powers that made the Deputy's influence so great.

Granatstein presented the case that federal civil service mandarins were able to create mechanisms that allowed their Ministers to "shape, direct and control the course of events in Canada." His study concluded that, concomitantly, the Deputies "created a central government structure and system in which great power and influence flowed to them."<sup>57</sup> In order to decide whether Willis managed his department in the same way, this thesis examines his participation in curriculum design, bureaucratic functioning, operational structures, new program development, and the work of official commissions of inquiry.

This study is based on a comprehensive documentary record surviving in various locations. The British Columbia Archives and Records Service holdings on educational policies are extensive, although filed variously according to the departments involved or, alternatively, in the records of specific officials. Other records pertaining to education are found in the Premiers' papers as well as in the files of the Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Minutes of the meetings of the Council of Public Instruction, the cabinet group that oversaw education policy, are vital for establishing the record of educational policies and

---

<sup>56</sup> J. Woodrow, "Authority and Power in the Governance of Public Education: A Study of the Administrative Structures of the British Columbia Education System" (Ed.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>57</sup> J.L. Granatstein, The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. xii.

## Chapter 1

programs. These, together with various correspondence files (originals and microfilm), Orders-in-Council, the Department's Annual Reports and the reports of the Commissions, the Attorney General's files on school laws, and the Department of Health's files concerning school inspections offer a comprehensive evidence base. Original copies of Willis' correspondence are also housed in the Vancouver School Board archives. Records held by the B.C.T.F. have also proven to be a valuable source.

With respect to Willis' records housed in the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, Dunae noted that:

With very few exceptions, all education records created prior to 1946 have been accounted for by the B.C. Archives and Records Service. Researchers may assume, then, that departmental records (pre-1946) which do not appear in this document are kept by School District offices or have not survived.<sup>58</sup>

For the most part, details of Willis' work can be discerned from the official Department of Education records, including microfilmed correspondence, despite the fact that much relevant documentation for the interwar years was destroyed.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Department of Education's files remain the principal documentary source, the province's leading newspapers commonly reported accounts of speeches almost verbatim, or at least by extensive quotation. Other particularly useful sources have been S.J. Willis' typewritten essay of 1934 housed in the British Columbia Archives and reports of his speeches to annual teachers' conventions reported in the B.C. Teacher. Interviews

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Dunae, Inventory of Government Records Relating to Public Education in British Columbia 1852 to 1946 (Victoria: BCARS, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Many administrative files from the 1920s were not preserved when the Department first transferred records to the Archives. Similarly, many records from the 1930s were discarded in 1949 when the Department of Education moved from the West Annex of the Parliament Buildings to new offices in the Douglas Building on Government Street. Fortunately, many of the original copies of Willis' letters have been preserved in the Vancouver School Board Archives.

## Chapter 1

with several of Willis' contemporaries have added valuable personal dimensions and insights.

The following chapters present the life and times of the longest-serving Deputy Minister in British Columbia history. His career and its legacy form a significant part of this province's education system. The social, political and personal circumstances help to explain his career.

---

## Chapter 2

### State of the School System and Department in 1919

#### THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

##### Physical and human resources

As a benchmark of change, it is appropriate to consider the state of the provincial system at the time Willis assumed office. By the end of Alexander Robinson's nineteen-year career as Superintendent, the British Columbia system provided schooling for 72,000 pupils and employed 2,332 teachers. The teaching force was almost evenly divided between urban and country postings. City schools employed 1,154 teachers, and 1,178 teachers taught in rural areas. The 45 high schools collectively enrolled 5,806 pupils, taught by 197 teachers. A coterie of 12 inspectors reported on conditions in the field across a vast province consisting of a land area of 360,000 square miles.<sup>1</sup> Robinson had also overseen establishment of the normal schools. By 1919, the Vancouver Normal School enrolled 222 students in fall session and 209 in the January intake. At Victoria, 131 student teachers enrolled in the fall, and the term continued into the next year due to time losses during closure because of the influenza epidemic. On February 7, 1919, 130 students enrolled for the spring session.<sup>2</sup>

Most schools in 1919 were small wooden structures built according to standard Department of Public Works plans. A school construction spurt just before the First

<sup>1</sup> School statistics from British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1918-19 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1919), p. A 9 Introduction to Report, Letter of Transmittal to the Lieutenant-Governor.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. A 46.

World War occurred in response to a rapidly growing school age population both in cities and rural areas. The Public Works Department had determined that the most favoured size for a classroom, in one-room to four-room schools, was 27 by 32 feet. This was the size required to accommodate "an optimum number of 50 pupils per classroom."<sup>3</sup> In a sense, the rigidity of architectural practice hinted at invisible rigidities in the system's administration and curriculum. The choice of building plan and style of architecture affected physical school layouts for decades following their construction. Franklin and Fleming's architectural history of British Columbia schools reveals "there is an indication that log schoolhouses were built as late as 1920, and were used until the 1940s."<sup>4</sup>

In the major cities of Vancouver and Victoria, most school construction between 1900 and 1920 was brick. Such schools were infinitely more architecturally splendid than the simple structures in rural areas. In addition to special architectural effects and large windows, the urban brick buildings were large and multi-storied, and featured specialized classroom space for physical education, manual training and domestic science.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, school districts were overseen by elected boards of trustees. By 1919, the Education Office recognized that "the three man rural school boards of pioneer days had reached the end of their usefulness." Thereafter, the Council for Public Instruction could appoint official trustees to replace rural boards which did not carry out their functions. Johnson considered that this was mainly "because it was becoming increasingly difficult to find local residents with the education, time and interest for school

---

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Franklin and John Fleming, Early School Architecture in British Columbia: An Architectural History and Inventory of Buildings to 1930 (Victoria: Heritage Conservation Branch, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

board duties."<sup>6</sup> It is hard to believe that this had not been so in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. Still, the pressure on the system in 1919 must have been enough to force political reorganization, or the contemplation of it.

During autumn of 1918 and winter of 1919, the influenza epidemic disrupted the school year. Illness took its toll on the teaching profession and many teachers lost their lives. As soon as the epidemic hit, Inspector J.B. DeLong reported that many high schools were closed "for upwards of two months."<sup>7</sup> Inspectors of several districts reported losing a term's work. Social and physical circumstances thus added to the social and political difficulty faced by the public education system.

As Willis had himself witnessed first-hand, before widespread illness disrupted the system, the Vancouver school population was burgeoning and there was critical need for funds to build more schools. Although some Vancouver schoolchildren had their classes in temporary buildings, attics and basements, the by-laws conducted in January 1918 and January 1919 for school improvements were defeated both times.<sup>8</sup> Vancouver school Inspector Leslie J. Bruce felt compelled to remark in his report on the overcrowding. His comments included a rebuke to the public that "classrooms in basements and attics are a disgrace to a modern city. That schools are handicapped by such conditions seems to be

---

<sup>6</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1964), p. 97. Although such power existed, in reality it only was exercised a few times. Replacement of local boards with official trustees was not a common practice.

<sup>7</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1918-19 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1919), p. A 18.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. A 23. J.T. Pollock, Inspector of Schools for Vancouver, reported that "Although existing conditions have been stated clearly to the public, and the demand for funds was energetically supported by those interested in the progress of the school, the by-laws have been defeated twice." See also Jean Barman, "Knowledge is Essential for Universal Progress but Fatal to Class Privilege," Labour/Le Travail 22 (Fall 1988): 9-66.



due entirely to the attitude of the ratepayers."<sup>9</sup> Although that school inspector viewed the ratepayers as unyielding and parsimonious, the fact remained that people had little money. The lack of sufficient operating funds added to the burden of overseeing the system province-wide. The implications of inadequate funding -- inadequate certainly in the eyes of administrators -- were numerous and various, ranging from infrequent inspection to poor "productivity."

As a former principal, Willis was undoubtedly well aware that the job of overseeing the schools, even those close to Victoria, was an overwhelming task for inspectors. Inspector H.H. MacKenzie put in a bid for more meaningful and frequent school inspections, fully cognizant that his comment meant an increase in personnel. Allowing that school closures made visits to all 250 classrooms impossible, he alluded to the "dawn of the *New Era*" when "truly efficient inspection" would come. "Paying a flying annual visit to rural schools presided over by young girls -- the majority of whom are still in their 'teens -- is not doing well the work of public school inspection." MacKenzie also lamented that it was becoming more difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers:

Women are entering other professional and commercial fields where value is given for value received, where remuneration is commensurate with labour and energy expended, and bears a reasonable ratio to the cost of living.

If school teacher salaries were too low for women, they were certainly no inducement to men either. "The passing of the male teacher still continues to be the tragedy of the schools," concluded MacKenzie at the end of his report. The education department and its teachers continued to be constrained by lack of adequate financial resources.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. A 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. A 26.

### **The Budget**

In the 1918-19 school year, the government spent \$1.8 million or 15% of its \$12.1 million budget on the Department of Education. The total province-wide expenditure on education in that year was \$4.2 million, of which more than half (\$2.4 million) was contributed by the cities, municipalities and rural and assisted school districts.<sup>11</sup> Robinson's last budget detailed various classes of expenditure. For the 1918-19 school year, these included operating the Education Office at Victoria, including salaries, office supplies and travel expenses; the Free Text-book Branch; Agricultural Education; Industrial Education; Inspection of Schools; the Provincial normal schools at Vancouver and Victoria; the Deaf, Dumb and Blind School; grants to libraries; erection, maintenance and repair of school buildings; transportation of children to central schools; and grants and rent payments to school districts. These various line items show that in 1919, state intervention in education had become more diverse than Ryerson would have expected, but that it had not yet strayed from the central vision of the founder.

## **THE DEPARTMENT**

### **The Superintendent's Duties**

The duties and responsibilities facing Willis upon assuming office had been set out in the 1872 Public Schools Act which had been amended and re-enacted six times by 1919. The 1872 Act allowed the appointment of a Superintendent of Education who would be *ex officio* Chairman of the Board of Education. He was to hold office at the pleasure of the Lieutenant-Governor. The Act further stipulated that the Superintendent be "a fit and

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. A 15.

proper person" who was also "an experienced and successful Teacher of at least five years' standing, holds a first class certificate from some college, school, or Board of Examination in some other Province or Country where a Public School System has been in operation."<sup>12</sup> The Superintendent's duties were spelled out in ten sections requiring him to visit all schools annually, to deliver a public lecture at least once a year on the object and principles of practical education, and to resolve disputes occurring over the election of trustees.<sup>13</sup>

The Public School Acts of 1872 (amended in 1873 and 1874), 1876, 1879 and 1885 had been repealed with successive legislation and the Act which was in force by the time Willis assumed office in 1919 had been enacted April 20, 1891 as the Public School Act of 1891.<sup>14</sup> The language of the Act speaks to the range of responsibilities and the degree of involvement and engagement with the system which was expected of the most senior official. The duties of the Superintendent were listed in Section 8. "It shall be the duty of the Superintendent of Education:

1. To take charge of and safely keep all apparatus that may be procured for school purposes, and to furnish, at his discretion, on the application of the Trustees of any district, such apparatus as may be required for the schools in such district.
2. To establish a separate school for females in any district where he may deem it expedient so to do; and such school, when so established, may be presided over by a female teacher or teachers, but otherwise shall be subject to the same obligations and regulations as Public Schools generally under this Act.
3. To examine and enquire into, from time to time, the progress of the pupils in learning, the order and discipline observed, the system of instruction pursued, the mode of keeping the school registers, the average attendance of pupils, the character and condition of the buildings and premises, and to give such directions as he may judge proper.
4. To do all in his power to persuade and animate parents, guardians, trustees, and teachers to improve the character and efficiency of the Public Schools, and to secure the sound education of the young generally.

---

<sup>12</sup> An Act Respecting Public Schools, April 1872, Section 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 8.

<sup>14</sup> British Columbia, Statutes, Public School Act, 1891.

5. To have, subject to the Council of Public Instruction, the supervision and direction of the Inspectors and schools.
6. To enforce the provisions of this Act, and the regulations and decisions of the Council of Public Instruction.
7. To organize, under regulations framed by the Council of Public Instruction, a Teachers' Institute or Teachers' Institutes.
8. To grant temporary certificates of qualification, countersigned by the Provincial Secretary; which temporary certificates shall be valid till the next examination of teachers.
9. To make annually, for the information of the Legislature, a report of the actual state of the Public Schools throughout the Province, showing the number of pupils taught in each School District, the branches taught, and average attendance, the amount of moneys expended in connection with each school, the number of official visits made to each school, the salaries of teachers, the number of qualified teachers, their standing and sex, together with any other information that he may possess respecting the educational state and wants and advantages of each school and district in the Province, and such statements and suggestions for improving the Public Schools and school laws, and promoting education generally, as he may deem useful and expedient; which report shall be laid before the Legislature within fifteen days after the opening of the next succeeding session thereof.
10. To be responsible for all moneys paid through him on behalf of the Public Schools, and to give such security as the Lieutenant-Governor in Council may require.
11. To prepare suitable forms, and to give such instructions as he may judge necessary and proper for making all reports and conducting all proceedings under this Act.
12. With due diligence, after any complaint shall have been made to him respecting the mode of conducting any election of Trustees (as hereinafter provided for), to investigate such complaint, and report the facts to the council of Public Instruction, who shall confirm or set aside such election; and in the latter case they shall appoint the time and place for a new election in such district.
13. To close schools where the average attendance falls below ten.
14. To cause copies of this Act, with regulations of the council of Public Instruction, to be published and furnished gratuitously to Trustees and teachers.

This codification of duties had been inherited and adapted from those school systems established in Canada West/Ontario, the United States, and Britain. The British Columbia school system was developed by borrowing from each of these. Willis was cast in the role of preserver and beneficiary of tried and proven educational systems. He must have felt some measure of responsibility to uphold and carry on many of the traditional educational practices.

### **Borrowed Traditions From Other Systems**

The code upon which British Columbia's non-sectarian education system was founded held that the system would be non-sectarian and that schooling would be funded through general revenues.<sup>15</sup> The system was to be administered by locally elected school boards reporting to a Superintendent. In turn, the Superintendent would chair a Provincial Board of Education. The Act also called for publication of annual reports, and uniform textbooks and department-administered examinations.<sup>16</sup> From its inception, the system was highly regulated and controlled.

The province of British Columbia was only ten months old when the first education legislation was passed: An Act Respecting Public Schools, in 1872. The Act embodied administrative structures borrowed from the educational experience in Ontario, Britain and America, but principally Ontario. Although future Superintendent of Education John Jessop and Provincial Secretary Alexander Rocke Robertson drafted the Act, influences of prior and contemporary Ontario educationists John Strachan and Egerton Ryerson helped inspire it and determined the form British Columbia's school system would take. Since Jessop had a formidable knowledge of and familiarity with Ryerson's public education system in Ontario, he was resolved to transplant it. F. Henry Johnson described this legislation as "obviously modeled on Ryerson's school legislation of 1846 to 1871 in Ontario."<sup>17</sup> After designing and putting the system in place, Jessop served as Superintendent from 1872 to 1878.

---

<sup>15</sup> The first school legislation in what was to become British Columbia was passed in 1869.

<sup>16</sup> F. Henry Johnson, "The Ryersonian Influence on the Public School System of British Columbia," BC Studies 10 (Summer 1971): 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 29. Also in the Annual Report for 1876-77, Jessop refers to "that admirable school system upon which ours is founded."

Jessop believed that Ontario's was a successful system, worthy of emulation and one also familiar to former Ontario residents settling in British Columbia. Gidney and fellow historian Lawr were among the first Canadian historians to focus on the motivations and ideas of the major Ontario school promoters. Their research was based on the voluminous correspondence received at the Education Department in Canada West/Ontario. They concluded that Ryerson, as Superintendent of Education, both responded to and led public opinion.<sup>18</sup> Gidney described the system well-established by the 1840s in Upper Canada/Ontario, as government led. He contended that such a heavily centralized system, which included control over textbooks, curriculum and teacher certification, "would have been considered intolerable in England during the same period."<sup>19</sup> That such a centralized system would be acceptable and become established in Canada is significant to the role Willis eventually played. He inherited and ran British Columbia's Department according to established patterns of central control.

Gidney's interpretation is in contrast to revisionist historian Curtis who cautions that although there existed among early educational officials privileged and propertied men who sought to exert their authority under such assumed "interests of education,"<sup>20</sup> others also had agency. He asserts that workers were active participants and organizers of their own educational activities and were not necessarily "repressed."<sup>21</sup> Instead, Curtis viewed

---

<sup>18</sup> Chad Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education," Acadiensis 15, 2 (1986): 169-90.

<sup>19</sup> Robert D. Gidney, "Making Nineteenth-Century School Systems: the Upper Canadian Experience and its Relevance to English Historiography," History of Education 9, 2 (1980): 101. Gidney quoted an English observer, Reverend James Fraser, reporting to a Royal Inquiry on Education, who opined that the Canadian system was even superior to that in England -- more complete and practical -- according to his assessment.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Curtis, True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 198.

educational reform as an essential process for state building.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, both historical interpretations are correct. The establishment of school systems resulted from both forces - leadership from educationists and growing support from parents eager to have schooling provided to their children.

Conditions in British Columbia at the end of colonial government and the acquisition of provincial status encouraged high expectations for advancement in government and in society. Jessop's personal ambition, coupled with the virtual absence of any challenge to his authority, gave more power to the Superintendent of Education position than existed elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> That British Columbia's school system should be so centrally organized came about through Jessop's authority as Superintendent and because of his determination, as Egerton Ryerson's disciple, to replicate the school system Ryerson had established in Ontario. But American and British influences were also present in British Columbia.

### **The Ontario Heritage**

The beginnings of Ryersonian public education in British Columbia can be traced to August 1861 when John Jessop opened the non-sectarian Central School in Victoria.<sup>24</sup> Jessop's esteem for Ryerson's educational philosophy, due in part to his having graduated

---

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846," Studies in Political Economy 10 (Winter 1983): 100.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Robert M. Stamp, "Evolving Patterns of Education: English Canada from the 1870s to 1914," in J.D. Wilson, et al., eds., Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 328.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, "The Ryersonian Influence in the Public School System of British Columbia," 27.

from Ryerson's Toronto Normal School, was cause enough to incorporate most aspects of the Ryersonian system in his own school.<sup>25</sup> Later, Jessop formally expressed in a letter to Ryerson his ambition to create an Ontario-style common school system in British Columbia. He spoke of establishing a non-sectarian school in Victoria and revealed his ultimate ambition:

My object is to establish its reputation, and when the city is incorporated, to fall in line with the common school system that will then be adopted, and place myself at the head of the common schools of Victoria and Vancouver Island.<sup>26</sup>

This system was characterized as tightly controlled with considerable power vested in the Superintendent. Wilson describes how all-pervasive that style of control was to be:

The essence of Ryerson's Common School Act of 1846 was its provision for a strong central authority to prepare regulations and curricula, to authorize suitable textbooks, and to improve the quality of teaching through certification, inspection and the erection of a normal school.<sup>27</sup>

Upper Canadian society was receptive to Ryerson's initiatives for reasons both financial and moral. Gidney and Millar described a social-political situation ripe for "improvement." Private and voluntary schools were thought not to be satisfactory by middle class parents who regarded such schools as inadequate and inefficient. Moral reasons included an acceptance of Ryerson's view that education could serve as "a vehicle to help man by the use of his reason to overcome ignorance and thereby, vice, crime and

---

<sup>25</sup> F. Henry Johnson, John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator: Founder of the British Columbia School System (Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1971), pp. 4-8.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, "The Ryersonian Influence in the Public School System of British Columbia," 28. This reference was cited from G.W. Spragge, "An Early Letter From Victoria, V.I.," Canadian Historical Review 29 (1948): 54-56.

<sup>27</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "The Ryerson Years in Canada West," in J. Donald Wilson, et al., eds., Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1970), p. 218.



juvenile delinquency."<sup>28</sup> As well, it was in parents' interest that government assume the costs of education. Gidney and Millar argue that these various reasons "legitimized education as a fit subject for government policy-making and public investment."<sup>29</sup> Curtis recognized similar expectations, in particular the incorporation of a Christian "ethic" and inculcation of values that would eliminate poverty and crime by shaping young people's attitudes. He claims that this became "the basis and cement of the structure of public education."<sup>30</sup>

These notions concerning the aims of schooling and resulting benefits for society were shared amongst scholars, clerics, and community leaders across the just-forming Dominion of Canada. Expectations were certainly not bound by geography, but were subscribed to widely. Westward migration by educationists brought Ontario's influence directly and ensured that it would be planted firmly in British Columbia. The highly centralized Ontario example would later be comfortable to Willis, both because it was familiar to him from his early teaching experience in British Columbia and also because of his dedication to running an efficient, well-controlled system.

The first government of British Columbia was assembled in November 1871. By invitation of Alexander Robertson, the Provincial Secretary, Jessop oversaw drafting of British Columbia's first education legislation.<sup>31</sup> The Public School Act of 1872 provided for schooling to be supported out of the province's general revenues, thus eliminating the

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar, "From Volunteerism to State Schooling: The Creation of the Public School System in Ontario," Canadian Historical Review 66, 4 (1985): 443.

<sup>30</sup> Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State," 111.

<sup>31</sup> According to custom in Canada, the Provincial Secretary cabinet position included responsibility for education. The first person to hold the title "Minister of Education" in British Columbia was Hon. James Baker, appointed in 1892.

necessity of tuition fees and local rates levies.<sup>32</sup> The administrative structure was comprised of a Superintendent, a Provincial Board and elected local school boards. A standardized curriculum and textbooks, provincial examinations and submission of annual reports by inspectors were also stipulated.

All of these provisions imitated Ontario legislation and embodied extensive centralized control. Copying the Ontario model ensured that input from the public and major stakeholders would not be ignored. In their analysis of the beginnings of the Ontario system, authors Lawr and Gidney argue that the school bureaucracy was not entirely negative in social effect. Its existence ensured mechanisms were in place for fair treatment and an apparently even distribution of opportunity in the system.<sup>33</sup> Neither was the bureaucracy a creature exclusively of the government's own making. Pressures and requests for conflict resolution from teachers and trustees also helped shape Ontario's system. Their influence originated many rules and regulations and continued on into the future.<sup>34</sup> Stamp's study of a century of Ontario schooling concluded:

In reality, there existed a strong reservoir of community power that shaped local and even provincial action for the full century after Ryerson's retirement.<sup>35</sup>

This opinion was shared by Houston who concluded that:

---

<sup>32</sup> School construction costs, however, were not always provided.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Lawr and Robert Gidney, "Bureaucracy vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System," Journal of Social History 13, 3 (1981): 438-457.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Lawr and Robert Gidney, "Who Ran The Schools? Local Influence in Education Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," Ontario History 72, 3 (1980): 132.

<sup>35</sup> Robert M. Stamp, The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), introduction.

The foundation of the provincial school system between 1846 and 1850 was the deliberate creation of Upper Canadians who shared a common outlook and common aspirations.<sup>36</sup>

Houston asserted that schoolmen's motivation was social control for the purpose of maintaining order. School promoters stressed the value of schools to taxpayers by arguing that schools would become a positive force for crime prevention and morality.<sup>37</sup> The positive aspects of social control were acceptable to Willis, who regarded inculcation of moral values and development of citizenship skills as responsibilities of the schools.

Other historians downplay the agency of schoolmen and parents, explaining instead the motivations of school promoters as a quest for some means of controlling and shaping their societies. As one of the main proponents of social control theory applied to the establishment of education systems in Canada, Prentice decried the notion of a school movement motivated by democratic and humanitarian impulses as a myth. She challenged the efficacy of education as a means to improve society or nineteenth century claims thereto. Her analysis argued that the privileged classes sought to protect the social order that kept them comfortable and she accused them of needing to control the workers to accomplish this. She contended that these motives superseded concern for pedagogical principles in designing the education system.<sup>38</sup> To a classically educated schoolman like Willis, such an analysis would be foreign. By virtue of his earnings and position, he had

---

<sup>36</sup> Susan E. Houston, "Politics, Schools and Social Change in Upper Canada," Canadian Historical Review 53, 3 (1972): 28. By 1867, the region had become known as Canada West. When the British North America Act was signed that year, the region became the Province of Ontario and one of the four original (Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick) provinces of the Dominion of Canada.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Alison Prentice, The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 14-15.

become one of the privileged members of society. Willis saw maintaining the *status quo* as a normal function.

Upon appointment on April 17, 1872 as British Columbia's first Superintendent of Education, Jessop became the enactor of the Public School Act. His tenure lasted over a seven-year period between 1872 and 1878. During this time, Jessop was unencumbered by a civil service and so could have considerable influence as effective Department head in shaping policies and defining curriculum. When he assembled the 1872 Public School Act, he incorporated features of the centrally-controlled Ryersonian system familiar from his training and teaching experience in Ontario. However, there was one significant departure. The provision that British Columbia schools be non-sectarian was different from legislation in the rest of Canada and in England. This happened largely due to the leadership of Jessop and Colonist newspaper editor Amor de Cosmos who actually conducted "a rigorous campaign against any sort of state aid to religious bodies."<sup>39</sup>

### **The American Experience and Influence**

The non-denominational character of British Columbia schools showed the effects of American influence. In the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of common schooling in the United States was similar to that in Upper Canada, with important distinctions. The American experience sometimes paralleled -- and at times preceded -- educational theories, organization and teaching methods espoused in Ontario and then in British Columbia.

---

<sup>39</sup> Frank A. Peake, The Anglican Church in British Columbia (Vancouver: The Mitchell Press, 1959), p. 47. Interestingly, British church influence was long-lasting. Initially referred to as the Colonial Church or Church of England in British North America, the Church of England in Canada retained that name until the General Synod at Edmonton (19th Session), August 30 - September 8, 1955.

In North America at the beginning of the nineteenth century, free schooling was associated with pauper schools, and thus a form of charity. Mid-nineteenth century school crusaders had to mobilize support and acceptance for free schooling as a public good. The effort was assisted by the childraising literature produced in America between the 1820s and 1830s which promoted the notion and influenced Canadian opinion that educating children would improve society. The public gradually came to accept and uphold what Katz has described as "the grandiose and unrealistic expectation that schools can solve America's social, economic, cultural, political and moral problems."<sup>40</sup>

By the late 1830s, the common school promoters had succeeded in introducing free, universal, non-sectarian public schooling at the elementary level in the industrialized northeastern United States. This success was predicated on a widely held belief that "a democratic government depended upon an educated citizenry."<sup>41</sup> There was also recognition of workforce requirements in a country shifting from an agricultural to an industrial economy. The same belief influenced the British Columbia public school system, albeit to a lesser degree owing to the province's geographical isolation and mainly agrarian-based economy. As in the United States, public schooling in British Columbia was to be non-sectarian.

American school promoters were driven by a missionary zeal. They believed in the work of creating a Christian nation, but one which was pan-Protestant as presented through the school. Tyack and Hansot described this in these terms:

---

<sup>40</sup> Michael B. Katz, Reconstructing American Education (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), Chapter 4, "History and Reform."

<sup>41</sup> H. Warren Button and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr., History of Education and Culture in America (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983), p. 84.

Many of the public school promoters of the mid-nineteenth century were convinced that America was literally God's country; the land He had chosen to bring about the redemption of Mankind.<sup>42</sup>

School promoters had clout in that they were usually prominent citizens of Protestant belief. There was generalized agreement that the nation's success depended upon a common vision. Schools were promoted as keepers of the social order and providers of the means to gain opportunities -- both individually and collectively:

In their vision the common school was to be free, financed by local and state government, controlled by lay boards of education, mixing all social groups under one roof, and offering education of such quality that no parent would desire private schooling. The common school was meant to be moral and religious in impact but it was not to be sectarian; it was to provide sound political instruction, without being partisan.<sup>43</sup>

Tyack and Hansot place the spread of schools and churches in the same nationwide social movement of institution-building. Both types of institutions were regarded as vehicles to ensure maintenance of a moral order and hope for a prosperous future. At a time when America was a decentralized and, compared with modern state organization, a minimally-governed country, the public education system helped to achieve national unity. The situation for British Columbia was tempered somewhat by its geographical isolation from the rest of the Canadian provinces. For many teachers, there was actually a stronger link with Washington, Oregon, and California whose universities attracted them to degree programmes and summer courses.

One fundamental difference in the two nations' accommodation of cultural differences had far-reaching impact on the political histories of Canada and the United States. From the beginning, there was no tolerance in the American common school

---

<sup>42</sup> David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America 1820-1980 (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1982), p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

movement for languages other than English. Newcomers to America were expected to accept the English language and adapt themselves to the evolving American culture. There was no room for difference:

Biculturalism was seen as being un-American, and was felt to represent a potential threat to the political stability of the nation.<sup>44</sup>

This contrasted with the attitude in Canada, but not necessarily British Columbia, that bilingualism and biculturalism should be embraced as advantages, not separate from good citizenship.<sup>45</sup>

Canadian education leaders continued to be alert to the American system's curriculum and organization. Indeed, prior to the offering of degree credit courses to teachers at U.B.C. in 1922, teachers who attained degrees were likely to have studied at American universities.<sup>46</sup> Skolrood notes that up until 1901 if teachers had any training or experience they "came chiefly from Great Britain, eastern Canada, and the United States."<sup>47</sup> Patterson also acknowledged that "As more Canadians pursued advanced studies, they looked to the more widely heralded institutions offering graduate study in education which were in the United States." The majority of foreign students at Columbia University from 1923 to 1938 were Canadian. Canadian teachers also attended in large

---

<sup>44</sup> Button, History of Education and Culture in America, p. 94.

<sup>45</sup> See the discussion on "Canadianization" in Neil Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), Chapter 13, "From Proposals to Policy: The 'New' Education Enters the Main Stream, 1910-1920."

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Harold Skolrood, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities From 1916 to 1963" (Ed.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1967), p. 104. The first two teachers to graduate from U.B.C.'s B.A. degree programme finished in 1929.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

numbers at Chicago, California and Stanford.<sup>48</sup> British Columbia educators did not function in isolation but looked out to what was happening in the world. Willis himself attended conferences in eastern Canada despite his aversion to travel. The world of education was becoming international, and there was genuine interest in foreign education systems.<sup>49</sup>

### **British Traditions of Civil Service**

A third influence on British Columbia educationists was Great Britain, particularly in terms of bureaucratic and civic styles. British Civil Service traditions were transplanted to Canada through the Foreign Office and diplomatic service in Canada as a colony and later as a member nation in the British Commonwealth. By the late nineteenth century, a British-style bureaucracy was ensconced.

Much of the distinctiveness of the British Civil Service derived from the recommendations of the Report on the Organization of the Permanent Civil Service (the Northcote-Trevelyan Report) of 1853, published in 1854. Its recommendations were given the force of law by an order-in-council passed by the British Parliament in 1855.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> R.S. Patterson, "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education," in Essays on Canadian Education, eds. N. Kach, et al. (Calgary: Detselig Press Limited, 1986), pp. 72-73.

<sup>49</sup> An example is the attendance of Indian philosopher Sir Rabindranath Tagore at the National Council of Education Conference in Victoria April 26, 1929. His address was published in the B.C. Teacher 8, 5 (June 1929): 4-11 and 11, 1 (September 1929): 13-16.

<sup>50</sup> Richard A. Chapman, The Higher Civil Service in Britain (London: Constable & Co., 1970), p. 32. The Civil Service Commission of Great Britain is the oldest public service commission in the world.



Acceptance of the report is thought to mark the beginning of the modern civil service in Britain.

There is a sense in which there was no Civil Service in Britain until after the middle of the nineteenth century; there were many officials but they would not have regarded themselves as belonging to a service. There were no common principles of recruitment, control, or organization in the various departments of the central government. 1855 is generally taken as the beginning of the Civil Service as we know it.<sup>51</sup>

The report recommended recruitment by open competition and examination, a division between intellectual and routine clerical tasks, and incremented salaries and opportunities through the ranks. Creation of a formal civil service was necessary to replace the existing patronage system. Although Queen Victoria feared that filling posts on the basis of competitive examinations would open the civil service to "low people without breeding," Chapman explains that higher standards was thought essential to ensure competency in the posts.<sup>52</sup> Appropriately qualified public servants were to be recruited, examined and promoted on the basis of ability.

The ideal civil service was conceived as a body of university-trained men, schooled in analytical thinking, who had "an inner determination to find out the right answer at all costs," who were not swayed by personal prejudices and who were non-political and thus able to "serve Government of all parties with equal loyalty and obtain their confidence."<sup>53</sup> The personal qualities of candidates were also regarded in determining their fitness for appointment. Those considered ideal were enumerated in Kelsall's analysis of

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 21. This was also concluded by Sir Edward Bridges, "The Reforms of 1854 in Retrospect," Chapter 3 in William A. Robson, ed. The Civil Service in Britain and France (London: The Hogarth Press, 1956), pp. 25-33.

<sup>52</sup> Chapman, The Higher Civil Service in Britain, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> Bridges, "The Reforms of 1854 in Retrospect," p. 31.

"efficiency." Kelsall acknowledged that the administrative class "have often been praised for their incorruptibility; their willingness to subordinate personal interest to that of the Service, their loyalty to Ministers, their conscientiousness and industry, their tact, personal charm and literary facility."<sup>54</sup> All of these pertained to the privileges of middle-class upbringing and British public school education.

British civil servants were meticulous record keepers. They were capable of managing deployment of vast numbers of bureaucrats throughout the Empire and devoted attention to complex accounting systems to record trade and resource acquisition for Britain. Ultimately, their records provided a basis for evaluating the economy and efficiency of Colonial government practices. Already established world-wide as leaders in bureaucratic management, these British notions of public accountability, together with modern principles of scientific management emanating from Frederick W. Taylor and Harvard University, were quickly applied to North American schools. "Efficiency" became the byword, and as Callahan acknowledges:

And school administrators, already under constant pressure to make education more practical in order to serve a business society better, were brought under even stronger criticism and forced to demonstrate first, last and always that they were operating the schools efficiently.<sup>55</sup>

British influence on the British Columbia population in the mid- to late- nineteenth century was such that "it was natural that early government and early school leaders would adopt a management model based on imperial traditions of public service."<sup>56</sup> British

---

<sup>54</sup> R.K. Kelsall, "The Social Background of the Higher Civil Service", Chapter 12 in William A. Robson, ed., The Civil Service in Britain and France, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Fleming, "Our Boys in the Field", p. 54.

Columbians agreed that they would follow British statutory practices. The executive council was patterned after the British Privy Council.<sup>57</sup> British ideas and forms of conduct were "proper" and gained broad acceptance. Reasons for this are several, prominent among them being the fact of sheer numbers since Britons comprised the dominant ethnic group. The 1921 Census recorded the zenith of British descendants, 387,500 people representing 74% of the total population.<sup>58</sup>

Appropriation of British bureaucratic and civic styles was assisted through the professions and elite social, fraternal and service organizations. In the educational bureaucracy, British theories and practices were transferred through movement of countrymen in teaching and administration. Rogers noted that British educational ideas were espoused, promoted and sustained in British Columbia well into the 1950s, long after they had been set aside or abandoned altogether in Britain. He explains that this happened at the behest of a "predominantly British educational establishment" in the province.<sup>59</sup> Transfer was also accomplished with assistance from patriotic organizations such as the IODE:

Reinforcement of imperial nationalism and anglo-conformity in the schools was promoted by the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), an elite group of women mostly of middle class British origin, united under the motto "One Flag, One Throne, One Empire."<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Patrick Dunae, Archivist, Historical Records, Public Archives of British Columbia. Dunae observed that the reason why British Colonial civil servants could move so interchangeably throughout the Empire was that their training and administrative structures were consistent.

<sup>58</sup> Figures for 1871 are estimates based on Colonial records. The 1921 figures are from Census data. Cited as Table 5 in Jean Barman, The West Beyond The West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 363.

<sup>59</sup> Anthony William Rogers, "W.P. Weston, Educator and Artist: The Development of British Ideas in the Art Curriculum of B.C. Public Schools" (Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983), p. iii.

<sup>60</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986), p. 145 The IODE influence

The idea of nobility of service came in part from Britain, along with a certain style of administration. Robson remarked on the social stature once held by civil servants:

Another and more subtle factor which has contributed to the success of the British Civil Service is the high social esteem in which it had been held. To serve the State well and faithfully is regarded in England as one of the highest callings to which a man can devote his life.<sup>61</sup>

In British Columbia's early governments, some key players were men of British descent, anxious to serve the Empire. Willis upheld this belief in addresses throughout his career. On the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the Victoria High School, where Willis had been Principal when the building opened in 1914, he exhorted:

This High School exists to build character among the youth of today so that they may assume the responsibility of citizenship tomorrow, and whatever economic or scientific changes are brought about in the system of government, I want you to remember that the requirements of character are the same--loyalty, integrity, a deep sense of duty, consideration for your fellow man, and a wealth of tradition that has made the British Empire what it is today.<sup>62</sup>

These sentiments were also embodied in his communications within the education bureaucracy.

---

was prevalent into the early 1950s. Dr. Bernard Gillie recalled in a May 24, 1991 interview that flag parades were staged in the auditorium while he served as Principal of the S.J. Willis School in Victoria.

<sup>61</sup> Robson, The British System of Government, p. 25.

<sup>62</sup> The Colonist, 9 May 1934, p. 3.

### **Alexander Robinson's Organizational Legacy**

Willis benefitted from and built upon the organizational legacy he inherited from Robinson. Though vastly different in temperament and style, each was passionately committed to the good of the Department. Both had reputations as competent, dedicated and loyal civil servants.

Together, Robinson and Willis influenced and helped shape the educational enterprise in British Columbia for forty-six years. Their collective impact, by dint of years of tenure, was profound.

The Department Willis inherited from Robinson in November 1919 had been shaped by Robinson since April 1899. Its evolving management system and school organization were based on British Civil Service traditions copied by many governments within the Commonwealth. In Fleming's view, these embody such features as trust in hierarchical authority and faith in the values of law, traditions, loyalty and seniority, consistent with the British Empire notion of the efficient management ideal as a "politically led but neutral civil service."<sup>63</sup>

Historical studies of education by Alexander Robinson's contemporaries offer insights into the significance of the Superintendent's place in the educational hierarchy.

---

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of these notions see Thomas Fleming, "Letters from Headquarters: Alexander Robinson and the British Columbia Education Office, 1899-1919", unpublished manuscript, University of Victoria, 1992. Also "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988," BC Studies, 81 (Spring 1989), pp. 51-54.

"The supreme control of education"<sup>64</sup> was vested in the Council of Public Instruction, a body constituted of members of the government's executive council or cabinet. William Burns, principal of the Vancouver Provincial Normal School from its establishment in 1901 until his retirement in 1920,<sup>65</sup> described the two top positions:

The Minister of Education ... takes direct control of Educational affairs. To assist him in this, and to direct more especially the professional side of his work, a Superintendent of Education is appointed, who has control of all the various departments, and whose additional duty it is to frame the Annual Report to the Legislature containing information regarding all expenditures and other details requisite for their information.<sup>66</sup>

Notably, *both* the Minister and the Superintendent were to exert control, as the formal hierarchy was bifurcated at the highest level. The division of responsibilities, and the decision which of the two would make official pronouncements, was made not according to any established policy. In the examples quoted or discussed in subsequent chapters, either the Minister or the Superintendent/Deputy would take charge of the communication in response to incoming correspondence or issues raised by deputations. Sometimes, marginalia or covering memos indicate a formal transfer of correspondence from one to another on a particular issue. The Superintendent/Deputy had both the opportunity and the implied responsibility to influence decisions, policies, and direct management.

Other contemporary accounts from the early twentieth century describe the Superintendent's duties in exact and specific terms as the person "upon whose ability and diligence the success of the school system largely depends":

---

<sup>64</sup> William Burns, "The Education System of British Columbia," in British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present, Vol. II, eds. F.W. Howay and Ethelbert Olaf Stuart Scholefield (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914), pp. 623-644.

<sup>65</sup> Donald Leslie MacLaurin was appointed Principal of the Victoria Normal School established in 1915.

<sup>66</sup> Burns, p. 639.

He, assisted by a board of examiners, examines and issues certificates to teachers, examines candidates for entrance to the High schools, examines and issues certificates in the different grades of the High schools, draws up the school report, frames courses of study, authorizes text books, answers the thousand and one questions daily sent to him by teachers, trustees, and parents, and in fact superintends the education of the province in all things from matters concerning general policy to the most minute details.<sup>67</sup>

George Hindle's 1918 thesis provides valuable insight because it is one of the few contemporary analyses of the Robinson era. Hindle credited Alexander Robinson as being the major force behind organization and management of the provincial education system:

The consensus of opinion among inspectors, school principals and legislators, with whom the author has discussed the matter, is that credit for the excellences of the system -- and they are not a few -- is due mainly to the Superintendent.<sup>68</sup>

Robinson's control of the system was organized within his authority as outlined by the Public School Act. He supervised and directed the work of inspectors in the field and of teachers in the schools; enforced provisions of the Act, including unpopular ones like closing schools where average attendance fell below ten in organized districts and below eight in assisted schools; directed the teachers' institutes; and supervised trustee elections.

How firmly and thoroughly the central office controlled the schools was illustrated by an incident in 1911 culminating in the resignation of Vancouver City Superintendent, W.P. Argue, who had served since 1903. Argue and the trustees had proposed to relieve principals in large schools of their teaching duties to concentrate on administrative work. The Education Office<sup>69</sup> rejected the plan and sent two inspectors to Vancouver to ensure

<sup>67</sup> E.B. Paul, "The Educational System of British Columbia," Victoria Times, Royal Souvenir Number, 1901, p. 41.

<sup>68</sup> George Hindle, The Education System of British Columbia: An Appreciative and Critical Estimate of the Educational System of the Mountain Province (Trail: Trail Print and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1918), p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> Officially defined in legislation as the Office of the Council of Public Instruction, in Hindle's thesis and in newspaper accounts this title was commonly used.

the principals resumed ordinary class instruction. Argue resigned in protest, and Hindle argued the circumstances of this event illustrated "why trustees and city superintendents as well as the rank and file of teachers have come to regard the Education Office as a species of benevolent despotism."<sup>70</sup> Despite this criticism, Hindle thought Robinson's control had produced an excellent system. He agreed with the main stakeholders in the educational enterprise -- namely the inspectors, school principals and legislators -- that the system was being run efficiently and was effective. The main measure of progress was pupils' ability to pass exams and to progress through the grades.

As the examples which follow indicate, from his early years in the post, teachers saw Robinson as an adversary.<sup>71</sup> In February 1901, they protested to the Education Minister over Robinson's decision to postpone a meeting with the Teachers' Institute for a year on the grounds that he had too much work to do with the House in session that year and the preparations for opening the new normal school in Vancouver. The excuse was likely valid, but he may simply not have been interested. When Robinson finally met with the Provincial Teachers' Institute in 1903, he proposed to them "that the President of this Association should not be continually himself -- the work being too much."<sup>72</sup>

As Superintendent, Robinson believed control of the Department and its teaching staff were his responsibility. He objected strongly to the teachers' decision to bypass his authority and to seek the Minister's attention. He summoned their leaders and cautioned them to be careful in approaching the Minister on matters pertaining to the

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>71</sup> See newspaper articles: The Province, 23 February 1901, p. 1, "Trouble Among The Teachers"; The Province, 22 June 1901, p. 11, "Mr. Robinson Backs Down"; and The Colonist, 22 June 1901, p. 6, "Trouble In The Schools."

<sup>72</sup> Minutes, Provincial Teachers' Institute, Revelstoke, April 14-16, 1903, p. 113.



Superintendent's office. The teachers refused to accept this admonition, and they "insisted that when they thought fit to do so they would lay matters of interest before the minister."<sup>73</sup> This insistence on deference to his position marked the beginning of his uneasy relationship with the field staff. Challenges to his authority ultimately caused his undoing.

In 1906, attacks on the Education Department became attacks on Robinson. The Legislature had passed a new Education Act that year which enlarged the Superintendent's powers to grant him more authority in the selection and employment of teachers.<sup>74</sup> This had been broadly interpreted amongst the public to mean that school board authority, and with that the wishes of the public, would be disregarded by the Superintendent. Newspaperman W.C. Nichol sprang to Robinson's defense in a spirited editorial:

He has long been an object of dislike to every incompetent teacher and every incapable trustee in the province. It is readily understandable that in thus pursuing his policy of elevating the educational standard in the province he should excite the enmity of all those who cannot reach the requirements he sets and unfortunately the animosity thus created is taken advantage of by many of his opponents who have personal ends to serve and who are not unwilling to serve them to the detriment of the public interests.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> "Trouble Among The Teachers," The Vancouver Province, 23 February 1901, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> As early as the 1871-72 Public Schools Act, authority for hiring was vested in local school boards.

<sup>75</sup> "Attacking The Education Department," The Vancouver Province, 23 March 1906, p. 6. Robinson's problems were reminiscent of those which Egerton Ryerson faced as Upper Canada's Chief Superintendent of Schools from 1844 to 1876. For a full and revealing insight into the problems and issues raised by taxpayers and trustees, see Douglas Lawr and Robert Gidney, "Bureaucracy vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System." Journal of Social History, 13, 3 (1981: 438-457. These historians examined the incoming correspondence to Ryerson's office and discovered the "recurring problems and complaints...which largely consumed the time of Egerton Ryerson." The authors cite examples of how the educational enterprise was confounded by "inexperienced trustees or those indifferent to record-keeping."

These comments reveal the degree of opposition Robinson engendered. He managed after only six years to establish himself as a lightning rod for public suspicion about the education system. For the rest of his career, it became moot whether the policies or the man proposing them was the actual basis for public disfavour. Robinson blamed "politics" as the reason for being removed as Superintendent in 1919 and remained bitter over the experience for many years later.<sup>76</sup> Unnamed Education Department officials, reflecting on the dismissal two years afterwards, commented to Victoria reporters that the reason Robinson had been retired from the Department was that the work had become too much for him. As a person devoted to practicing strong central authority, he was unable to adapt his administrative methods to a burgeoning department and increasing school population. Specifically, Robinson wanted to continue to do and be responsible for everything himself, and thus was unable to delegate work to subordinates.<sup>77</sup>

Robinson had organized the Department according to his personal requirements for authority and control. Inspector Lord declared:

Robinson *was* the Department of Education. There was never any doubt about that. Ministers of education came and went, but they had the additional portfolio of provincial secretary, and were content to allow a man considered to be both competent and economical to carry on, wishing only to be kept informed. As the years passed, Robinson came to know every detail of the education system; he might delegate responsibility to a subordinate but the final authority was his. He determined changes in policy and, where these affected the School Act, drafted the necessary amendments and briefed the minister who had to present them to the legislature for approval. Changes in curriculum, major review of textbooks, and requirements for teacher certification were made on his initiative.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Recalled by family friend, Stewart J. Graham, who as a guest at the Robinson home heard him discuss this subject. Interview July 31, 1993 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham.

<sup>77</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 30 July 1921, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> A.R. Lord on Alexander Robinson, John Calam, ed., Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), pp. 120-121.

What Robinson considered to be the significant accomplishments in his career were listed in a letter written November 10, 1919 to the Hon. J.D. MacLean, Minister of Education. Robinson had been delivered notice of his dismissal as Superintendent. Robinson recounted:

In reply to your charge that I am not sufficiently progressive, may I remind you that during the past twenty years the courses of study for Public and High Schools have been revised, enriched, and amplified; that the Public School Act has been modernized and now embraces principles in some respects in advance of those contained in the school statutes of any Province in Canada; that Instruction in Manual Training, in Domestic Science, in Elementary Agriculture and in the elements at least of Technical Education has been introduced into our schools; and that two excellent Normal Schools with adequate teaching staffs have been established.<sup>79</sup>

A political event became a factor in Robinson's undoing. That was the organized strike of Victoria's teachers in 1919. Although the strike lasted only a week, it was the first time an organized withdrawal of teaching services had ever taken place "in the British Empire, if not the whole Universe," according to Harry Charlesworth, the B.C.T.F.'s first General Secretary.<sup>80</sup>

Controversy had constantly punctuated Robinson's career as Superintendent. These contentious events were rooted in Robinson's strong personal conviction that his civil

<sup>79</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 11 November 1919, p. 5. Robinson complained of the unceremonious way he had been dismissed. The Minister's secretary delivered the letter at 3:50 p.m. on November 3. Robinson replied "after slightly more than twenty years' and six months' service as Superintendent, you dismissed me without cause and gave me one hour and ten minutes in which to vacate my office."

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia, p. 241. The comment was made in a paper entitled "Teachers' Institutes", B.C.T.F. Archives and Records. Although the 1919 strike was the first one organized across a district, it was preceded by an event a half century earlier. In September 1870, John Jessop and his fellow teachers withdrew their services for lack of payment and closed the Victoria City and District public school for two years. Technically, that was the first strike.

service function was to uphold the "common good."<sup>81</sup> His positions and decisions were not always popular, and his confrontational style and renowned temper eventually led to his removal from the job in 1919.

According to Fleming, Robinson's era was as tumultuous as his personality. His experience as Superintendent was affected by both his personal characteristics and the political climate in which he functioned. The situation changed with new leadership under Willis:

Until the 1920s, when the reins of the educational civil service were steadied in the hands of S.J. Willis, the vulnerability and political turmoil characteristic of the modern local superintendency equally described the organizational culture in which the province's chief schoolmen worked.<sup>82</sup>

It is in this context of inherited traditions and confrontational circumstances that Willis assumed his role at the head of the educational bureaucracy in British Columbia. The following chapter discusses Willis' experience during the first five years of his Superintendency.

---

<sup>81</sup> See "Attacking the Education Department," The Vancouver Province, 23 March 1906, p. 6 and "Dr. Alexander Robinson," The Colonist, 5 November 1919, p. 4, for editorial comment on Robinson's goals for the Education Department.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988." BC Studies, 81 (Spring 1989): 60.

## Chapter 3

### Managing a Traditional System: 1919 - 1925

*We believe sincerely that there is not a single teacher in the whole province who does not hold Dr. Willis in profound respect.<sup>1</sup>*

#### CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL ORDER, 1919 - EARLY 1920s

From the turn of the century, labour unrest and widespread unemployment resulting from the depressed economy of the 1890s were powerful inducements for social reform.<sup>2</sup> These forces manifested themselves in two ways: the search for order and the late Victorian fascination with institutional solutions to social problems. Dominant opinion had it that schools and teachers should instill sound lifetime ideals and habits -- functions formerly served chiefly by churches and to a lesser degree in apprenticeship training.<sup>3</sup> If the goal of creating responsible, well-trained worker/citizens was to be achieved, practical changes in the delivery of education had to be made. The challenges facing authorities were enormous.

Industrialization indirectly had the effect of popularizing the twin themes of efficiency and economy both in business and in government. Vancouver's industrialization can hardly be compared to that of Toronto, Chicago or Montreal. Yet Vancouver's economic history, along with evolution of public opinion in the city, led to demands for improvement through "efficient" education.

---

<sup>1</sup> The B.C. Teacher, 25, 2, (November 1945): 45.

<sup>2</sup> Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet and Mark J. Stern, The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). See especially Chapter 7, "Youth and Early Industrialization," for a discussion about the impact of work availability on social relationships, pp. 242 - 284.

<sup>3</sup> W.A. Bruneau, "Towards a History of Moral Education: Some Fundamental Considerations and a Case Study," Paedagogica Historica, 15 (1975): 356 - 378.

As a port city, Vancouver gained importance as a distribution centre on the west coast.<sup>4</sup> North Americans agreed that if skillful management was essential to business, so it was to schools. Callahan studied the reasons why, between 1900 and 1930, urban American school administrators adopted the values and practices of the business world. His investigation convinced him that it was due to "the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and pressure." They identified with and emulated the language and management style of the most powerful and influential group -- the business leaders -- and the notions of scientific management and efficiency.<sup>5</sup> Dunn notes that, in the 1920s, educators began to recommend that schools be re-organized along business lines. Eventually, "a rationalized, professionalized and specialized administrative structure emerged to deal with spiralling enrolments and soaring costs."<sup>6</sup> Vancouver school leaders were not immune from this North American affinity for borrowing from business practices. They likely saw and liked the rewards of business-like management and the potential to align their educational and social interests with those of successful industrialists.

During the period preceding the First World War, Western Canada experienced rapid population growth through immigration. Successive governments in British Columbia, as in the rest of the country, had to consider and react to waves of public

---

<sup>4</sup> Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 112-113.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), preface. A similar conclusion was drawn by Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia 1900-1929," in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1980), pp. 23-51. He concluded that the British Columbia school system reflected what was going on in the larger society. Overall, there was a search for order and efficiency. People came to expect that this would also apply to education.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, p. 38.

opinion about learning and the purpose of schooling. The bureaucracy found that it had to accommodate or otherwise take account of various social and educational movements. A number of developments influenced the schools and involved the administrative structure. Some of these have been identified by Jones as:

- (1) the public health movement, "which sought perfection of the race and the elimination of mankind's plagues";
- (2) the rural life movement, "which pictured the farmer as the symbol of national greatness and durability";
- (3) the social gospel movement, "which sought to solve the nation's problems by applying the principles of Christian living";
- (4) the school expansion movement, "which idealized a broader, reconstructed school under which dedicated leadership could inspire communities to enlightenment and self betterment."<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not these were all *movements*, they did give rise to health inspections in schools, introduction of agricultural subjects and school gardens, daily Bible readings, and extension of course offerings to adults. Additionally, schools felt the influence of the child saving movement which sought to remove children from unsanitary and unsafe circumstances, the temperance movement to counsel against the evils of alcohol, and the labour movement which supported ending child labour in factories. Willis was a humanitarian, and the record of his work shows that he behaved consistently in promoting human welfare. As such, he would have upheld, or at least have been receptive to, ideas or movements which improved social life and social relations. Many of these, as will be revealed in examples of his actions and decisions described in these chapters, had influence on education in British Columbia. As a Christian, he would have accepted Bible reading in schools as appropriate, although he had no public comment on the issue. Bible reading was sincerely promoted from 1928 to 1933 during Hinchliffe's ministry.

---

<sup>7</sup> David C. Jones, "The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement: Education and the Myth of the Land." in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1980), p. 72.

The Department also began promoting values associated with rural life, such as spiritual renewal, closeness to the land, neighbourliness, optimism, and belief in the rewards of simple, decent living. Central education authorities introduced practical courses in agriculture and began consolidating country school districts into larger districts to make possible a greater variety of course offerings.<sup>8</sup>

When Willis assumed office a year after the First World War ended, economic prosperity was coming back in British Columbia, but life was not returning to normal. As already noted, dramatic social changes were occurring. The province had rejected prohibition,<sup>9</sup> and the political arena became open to women.<sup>10</sup> The First World War had reduced suspicions of American ideas,<sup>11</sup> most notably of Progressivism. American and British concepts of Progressive education were borrowed, but not "bought" entirely.

---

<sup>8</sup> John Wesley Gibson served as Director of Elementary Agricultural Instruction in British Columbia from 1915 to March 1929. He oversaw beautification of school grounds and establishment of school gardens.

<sup>9</sup> Government-controlled outlets for the sale of alcoholic beverages dotted the province. They became known as "John Oliver's drug stores". See a description of the Premier's perspective in S.W. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia (Sidney: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969), p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Ellen Smith was first elected in 1918. When Oliver appointed her to the cabinet in 1921, she became the first woman in the history of the British Commonwealth to hold a cabinet position.

<sup>11</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education," in Essays on Canadian Education, eds. N. Katch, et al. (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), p. 72. Patterson cited reliance by Canadian teachers on American publications and universities. He quoted H.J.T. Coleman's Report of the National Conference on Character Education in Relation to Canadian Citizenship (Winnipeg, King's Printer, 1919), p. 128, wherein he reported "All of our up-to-date information practically comes to us from the United States. We use the bulletin of the United States Bureau of Education to know what is going on in the western provinces even."



Rather, there was conditional support. Canadian educationists claimed to be selective and cautious in their adoption of educational reform.<sup>12</sup>

The rigorous mental discipline approach characterized by rote learning and uniformity gradually softened in the 1920s. Schools were expected to make subjects "meaningful" to the child and to relax rigid codes of conduct, thus permitting more activity and self-expression in classrooms. Although adaptation of "new education" methods was uneven and had mixed success depending upon the teachers' ability and understanding of the concepts, at least attempts were made. Patterson argues that implementation of Progressive principles emphasized classroom methodology more than underlying theory.<sup>13</sup>

As Superintendent, Willis had almost at once to face a controversy about high school examinations. Until 1921-22, students had been promoted to high school on the recommendation of their teachers. Problems arose when not all recommended students deserved to be promoted. A teacher lobby for the return of entrance exams began. The notion that a concerted effort could succeed in making a major policy change was a novel one. Yet this early attempt at lobbying did produce the desired results. School boards and high school teachers succeeded in convincing Willis that existing admission standards were not uniform, nor were pupils sufficiently prepared. Willis' remedy was to recommend "only the more studious and advanced pupils" and to require the rest to pass a high school examination with an average of 60%. The push for change succeeded, and Willis announced changes to the rules for high school admission in the 1921-22 Annual Report. Departmental examinations were set in arithmetic, geography, grammar and composition,

---

<sup>12</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "The Implementation of Progressive Education in Canada, 1930-1945," in Essays on Canadian Education, ed. N. Katch, et al. (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), pp. 86-87.

<sup>13</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education," p. 71.

drawing, penmanship, dictation and spelling.<sup>14</sup> Grounding in these basic subjects was necessary for the advanced studies of high school. The Annual Report further set out standards:

Candidates, in order to be successful, must obtain an average of 60 per cent, on examination, and also produce a statement from their teachers certifying that they have completed satisfactorily the work prescribed for Entrance classes in British history, Canadian history, English literature, nature-study, and hygiene.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, Progressive-style subject matter lay ahead, but one had to prove grounding in traditional subjects to get there.

The ascendancy of public opinion through organized attempts to influence government policy were forces Willis eventually had to recognize. The public was no longer a voting block to be swayed or enthused at election time by the political parties. The correspondence files contain many examples of communications from concerned citizens and teachers written directly to Willis. He was evidently well known and, in the public perception, the "head" of the education department, ahead of or apart from the string of elected politicians who held responsibility for the Education portfolio.

## **WILLIS' ADMINISTRATIVE STYLE**

Willis had the authority to summon advice and intelligence from any part of the system and also the opportunity to make changes. That he sought to do so was a departure from the authoritative decision-making that had been established practice. Willis made a difference with this approach that affected the provincial education system. In the period

<sup>14</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1921-22, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1922), p. C9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

just prior to Willis' appointment as Superintendent, the prevailing attitude of those at the top of the educational hierarchy was imperial.<sup>16</sup> It was not their practice to look for guidance from the teaching ranks. Teachers had opinions and yet their resourcefulness and experience was rarely called upon, save for a few whose performance attracted approval of the inspectors and Department officials. Skolrood acknowledged that "Occasionally a few teachers who had been noticed by authorities because of their outstanding work, or who had cultivated the favor of administrators, were consulted by the Department."<sup>17</sup> Outstanding teachers would occasionally be recruited for the public service, or for promotion within their districts. The majority had no outlet for their initiative. Skolrood discusses how this began to affect morale:

Teachers felt that they could offer much in the form of suggestions for improvement in education instead of having to be content with the *status quo* -- to remain silent, to interpret direction, and to obey orders. Any Department receptivity to teachers' suggestions would surely have resulted in the morale of the teaching body being higher than it was.<sup>18</sup>

Campbell also found little evidence that teachers were encouraged to contribute to school management or policy formation prior to the establishment of the B.C.T.F.:

Certain teachers who because of their outstanding work, or for some other reason, were popular with the administration, occasionally were consulted or their opinions asked concerning proposed changes in the system. The general attitude, however, was that the officials of the Department of Education were experts chosen for their ability to administrate, and that it was their duty to decide any educational problem which might arise.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988." BC Studies, 81 (Spring 1989): 50-76.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Harold Skolrood, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities From 1916 to 1963" (Ed.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1967), pp. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>19</sup> Claude Lane Campbell, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation" (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1930), p. 16.

Teachers were left in the professionally uncomfortable position of following departmental directives or obeying orders from trustees or inspectors. For any group of professionals, such circumstance eventually become untenable. In an era when communications with rural areas was difficult, if not impossible, due to the vagaries of climate and the postal service, the logistics ensured that such an effort to involve teacher opinion would be improbable. Teachers were geographically and professionally isolated.

One of the first indications of a change in administrative style from Alexander Robinson's era is revealed in the recollections of Inspector Alex R. Lord. He wrote about the experiences that he and his fellow inspectors encountered in their tours to visit schools. Lord remembered Willis as being concerned more with the broad picture of what was to be accomplished than with dwelling on lesser, trifling matters. Concerning the inspectors' tours, Lord recalled:

Up to 1919, expenses occurred during their official wanderings underwent the piercing scrutiny of Superintendent Alexander Robinson himself, though his successor, S.J. Willis, seemed less attracted to that level of accountability.<sup>20</sup>

Administratively, schooling had entered a different world. Along with less pettiness in supervision came a broadening acceptance of expertise from outside the departmental bureaucracy. Teachers and other citizens were becoming more actively involved in helping to shape the future of education in British Columbia.

Beginning in January 1923, a committee of teachers and laymen assembled under the auspices of the High School Teachers' Association of the Lower Mainland of British

---

<sup>20</sup> John Calam (ed.), Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36 (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1991) p. 17.

Columbia to begin a study of school administration in the province. Their final report, edited by Committee chairman Norman Fergus Black, was submitted in December 1925 and published in 1926, closely following the May 30, 1925 publication of the government-commissioned inquiry conducted by Drs. J. Harold Putman and George Moir Weir.

The Association's report, Peace & Efficiency in School Administration, was written for a broad audience. Education Minister J.D. MacLean lent stature to the recommendations by writing an introduction wherein he called the report "a valuable aid in developing educational policies in this province and elsewhere."<sup>21</sup> The introduction recognized the originality of carrying out a study of such magnitude, encompassing expert opinion on education from Britain, Canada and America. The report's wide-ranging recommendations included Progressive notions that there should be recognition of the value of extra-curricular activities, student participation in school administration, improved means other than written examinations to assess pupil progress, and more efficient functioning of local school boards.<sup>22</sup> One of the proposals called for a superintendent to oversee educational and business interests in each school district. In districts with only one principal, most superintendent functions were to be assumed by him. The committee plainly advocated a basic division of authority whereby "in general, the superintendent should supervise the principals and the principals should supervise their own schools."<sup>23</sup> Although the idea may have been practical, the Department under Willis was not ready to surrender official authority or control to that extent.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Norman Fergus Black, Peace & Efficiency in School Administration (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1926), p. x.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 185-196. A total of 88 recommendations is listed.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>24</sup> The district superintendency was created thirty-three years later, in 1958.

All the activity in the field, and the expectations raised among the public and in the school system by the spate of studies and surveys of the early 1920s, invites questions about the Deputy Minister's administrative style. How much of what was happening in the field was known in Victoria? Was information transmitted directly to the department and to Willis, or was it collected and stored without being seen by the highest-ranking administrators?

As one example, the problems of teachers trying to cope in remote postings were carefully recorded in individual reports sent to the Teachers' Bureau. Clearly there were problems, but it is not so obvious that they became known to Willis or the Minister. The Teachers' Bureau files<sup>25</sup> reveal that, although teachers in the 1920s and later their Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer constantly recommended that various posts be designated "men only" due to the trying nature of social and living conditions, the modal teacher continued to be a young, single woman. Stortz argued that the bureaucrats actually were unaware of how appalling conditions were in remote communities. He proposed that the highest officials may never have been privy to the Teachers' Bureau reports and also that inspectors sought to present accounts as positively and inoffensively as possible.<sup>26</sup>

This argument is plausible for several reasons. First, given their desire for future advancement, it was in the inspectors' interests that everything appear to be "going well" in their districts. Secondly, to be critical of the teachers' level of preparedness would reflect poorly on their colleagues teaching in the normal schools, and likely would have been interpreted as hostile comment. Thirdly, in practical terms, inspectors' visits were infrequent. When they did arrive, they spent their time primarily in administering the

<sup>25</sup> BCARS, GR 461, Teachers' Bureau, "School District Information Forms".

<sup>26</sup> Paul James Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), p. 50.

Department's tests of pupil progress and intelligence rather than in active trouble-finding. It was not until 1934 that emphasis shifted towards a new approach for the work of the inspectorate. At that time, Willis would laud the change in the inspector's role from critic to giver of advice and good counsel:

The point of view of inspection has changed considerably. Now perhaps more than at any time, the Inspector is the teacher's guide, helper and friend. He is not chiefly a person sent to appraise and perhaps criticize the teacher's work. I was pleased that at the last session of the Legislature an amendment was made whereby an Inspector is required to give one report only each year.<sup>27</sup>

This and the following examples are presented to indicate the scope of Willis' responsibilities and how he dealt with other major lobby groups in the educational enterprise: the Minister and cabinet, the B.C.T.F., and the public.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS

One of the main constituent groups in Willis' constellation of contacts was the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (hereafter B.C.T.F.) Although the B.C.T.F. was still a fledgling organization when Willis assumed office, the reasons for its creation mirrored the lot of teachers across the country. Conditions throughout Canada contributed to the creation of teachers' organizations in every province between 1916 and 1921. These conditions included "low pay levels, lack of adequate tenure protection, depressed standing on the social scale; the rise and success of the trade union movement in improving the working conditions of their members; the sharp inflation of the post-war economy; and the general condition of unrest in society."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> BCARS, GR 0139. That file contains a short essay by Willis typewritten in 1934.

<sup>28</sup> Jerry Bruce Roald, "The Pursuit of Status: Professionalism, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1965" (Ed.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970), Foreword.

Teachers' Institute meetings had been held occasionally, at the call of the government, as a forum to update teaching skills. Teachers had no input into the organization or content of the presentations at its annual meetings. Consequently, enthusiasm lessened along with motivation to attend the government-dominated sessions.<sup>29</sup> The lack of interest led to the organization's demise. It disbanded entirely when the First World War began. The fifteenth and last of the Provincial Teachers' Institutes was held April 14-16 at King Edward High School in Vancouver. Willis called the last special meeting, held March 29, 1921, at which a resolution was passed to close the Institute and to hand their funds over to the B.C.T.F. In December 1926, the B.C. Teacher published excerpts from Teachers' Institute records in an article entitled "Voices From the Past." "The Teachers' Federation decided that it was fitting that these funds should be placed in a reserve fund, to be used only in connection with the expenses of the special speakers engaged for future conventions, and this policy was adhered to until the money had been all expended."<sup>30</sup> B.C.T.F. executive minutes of April 17, 1920 record that this was discussed with Willis. "Mr. Willis was favorable to the idea of turning over the work and the funds of the Provincial Institute to the Federation, and promised to take steps to provide for such a transfer, if he had the necessary authority to do so."

Isolated local associations continued to carry on. Independently, they were unable to achieve their aims. However, the existence of these associations was generative; they were precursors of the B.C.T.F.<sup>31</sup> British Columbia became the first Canadian province to

<sup>29</sup> Claude Lane Campbell, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation", p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> B.C. Teacher, 6, 4, (December 1926).

<sup>31</sup> A detailed description of early Provincial Teachers' Institute activity and the transition to federation is available in a typewritten manuscript by Stanley Heywood, "The Early History of the B.C.T.F." (Undated), B.C.T.F. Records and Archives.



create a federation. It resulted from decades of uncertainty concerning what form such an organization should take. One of the early B.C.T.F. leaders, Harry Charlesworth, helped transplant the British National Union of Teachers (hereafter N.U.T.) policies and organizational practices. But he was by no means alone. British immigrants looked to the N.U.T. as a model for establishing a teachers' organization in British Columbia. Also, teachers moving west from Ontario had been familiar with Teachers' Institutes and Associations since the 1870s. The B.C.T.F. was formally voted into being at the first official meeting October 28, 1916, with the first Annual General Meeting held January 4, 1917.

The modest status of the profession was symbolized by teachers' limited financial means, for their salaries had not kept pace with rising living costs. The outbreak of war caused even more turmoil, and in some districts, salary schedules were suspended altogether.<sup>32</sup> U.B.C. Professor Sedgewick, in a 1919 speech to Vancouver teachers, remarked that:

the basic cause to which low status of the teaching profession must be ascribed was an economic one -- an insufficient salary. 'But there is one lesson Labour has taught us -- that there is a time when patience will not do, and must be replaced by force.'<sup>33</sup>

By individual effort, the teachers' situation was not likely to improve. Most teachers were isolated in rural communities and had to negotiate their salaries independently with their school boards.<sup>34</sup> In small communities the financial position of everyone in the district

---

<sup>32</sup> It was not until 1927 that a province-wide teacher salary scale became established.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Roy Archibald North, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Arbitration Process" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1964), p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Harold Skolrood, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities From 1916 to 1963" (Ed.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1967), p. 66. Author cites a B.C.T.F. survey conducted in 1921 which revealed "a complete lack of uniformity in payment of salaries." Teachers did not gain a provincial salary schedule until 1929.

would be known to all, and in hard times there was little prospect of maintaining regular salaries, let alone the chance to consider raises.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, teachers in cities had the opportunity to meet collectively, there was a larger tax base to support schooling and their numbers made a stronger voice.

Looking back, it is evident that the formation of the B.C.T.F. did empower the teachers. From its earliest years, resolutions passed at the B.C.T.F. convention were forwarded to the Education Department. Many suggestions were acted upon, such as the recommendation that more than one examiner mark the same subject, due to increasing student numbers. Once in office, Willis responded by calling for the names of specialists to be submitted so he might call upon their expertise.<sup>36</sup> Resolutions brought for ratification from the annual meeting normally were generated three ways: they were brought directly from local associations, they arose from sectional meetings, or they were submitted by the B.C.T.F. executive. Willis consistently was receptive to the B.C.T.F.'s concerns, and the B.C.T.F. executive meeting minutes record a very cordial, albeit formal, relationship with the Superintendent. Apart from the growth and complexity of the school system, a plausible explanation for their frequent interaction and mutual positive regard was Willis' genuine concern for teachers. Willis never viewed the B.C.T.F. as a union, and would have considered it unseemly for teachers to be lumped in with common labourers.

As teachers banded together country-wide to create formal associations, their movement fit with the times for, as Roald explains, "It was also an era of social

---

<sup>35</sup> Paul James Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s", p. 2. Stortz analyzed the statistical tables in the Department of Education annual reports for the 1920s and concluded that "the majority of schools in British Columbia were situated in the hinterland, far away from urban areas."

<sup>36</sup> Claude Lane Campbell, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation," p. 20.

reconstruction, and as such, perhaps the best of times to organize the teaching profession."<sup>37</sup> The lack of a formal continuously-operating teachers' organization meant there was no reliable forum in which to voice teachers' demands for better conditions, including living wages, appropriate housing, freedom from harassment by local boards and solutions to problems encountered in doing their jobs. The need for change had become imperative.

### **The first teacher strikes in Canada**

Organized and collective teacher action had occurred only nine months before Willis assumed office. The background to the 1919 strike originated with an event at the beginning of the First World War in 1914. The Victoria School Board suspended its salary schedule. Then, in January 1915, it reduced all salaries by 10%. The aim was to retrench costs while the war was on, with the understanding that teachers' salaries would be restored at the conclusion of the war. After peace returned, and economic conditions began to improve, teachers asked that the salary schedule be restored. It is noteworthy that they did not seek retroactive pay for the previous four years. They asked only that the prior schedule be restored and made more equitable. The Board agreed to restore the schedule and began meeting with the teachers to discuss creation of a new schedule for 1919-1920. The teachers had proposed a 10% across-the-board increase, retroactive to January 1, 1919, and also proposed more increments in the scale -- thereby raising the maximum salary. Teachers believed raises were necessary to keep pace with post-war inflation. Coming from the position of high school principal, Willis was acutely aware of teachers' salary scales.

---

<sup>37</sup> Roald, "Pursuit of Status: Professionalization, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955," p. 1.

After an impasse in negotiations with the Victoria School Board, the teachers threatened to strike on Monday February 10, 1919. That morning, 157 teachers went on strike.<sup>38</sup> The school board sought the advice of the Department of Education. On Tuesday, the Minister responded with a detailed arbitration arrangement. This was deemed acceptable by the teachers, and ended their strike a week later on February 17. Negotiations resumed on February 26. The following month, the government amended the Public Schools Act to include the following arbitration procedure: "The Board of School Trustees of any school district may enter into an agreement with one or more teachers by arbitration in such a manner as may be determined by agreement."<sup>39</sup> At their conclusion, teachers had realized some important victories. They received the long-sought salary increases which were eminently important. The greater gain was securing the right to participate in negotiations with their board.

The 1921 New Westminster strike was caused, in part, by teachers' discontent with salaries lower than those of teachers in neighbouring districts. Following the lead of their Victoria counterparts, the New Westminster teachers drafted a new salary schedule for consideration by their board and presented it at the November 1920 meeting.<sup>40</sup> At the end of January 1921, the board countered with its own schedule -- at half the amount the teachers' proposed. After trying to re-open negotiations, the teachers requested arbitration, and waited for the Board to reply. Budget estimates had to be submitted to the Legislature by February 15. Time was almost up when the Board announced it considered the matter closed and refused further negotiation. Officially, the dispute appears to have been

---

<sup>38</sup> Victoria School Board Minutes, Friday February 7, 1919, S.J. Willis School, Victoria.

<sup>39</sup> Statutes of British Columbia, 1919, Chapter 75, Section 116A.

<sup>40</sup> Roald, "Pursuit of Status: Professionalism, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955," p. 90.

regarded by the Department of Education as a local issue because there was no attempt to interfere.

Valentine's Day 1921 saw the beginning of the New Westminster strike. Steadfastly, the Board refused offers of arbitration. Community groups and unions put their support behind the teachers. Lengthy negotiations produced a settlement, and schools reopened after only a week-long strike, on February 21. The local teachers' association won formal recognition and the right to become a party in salary negotiations. The Board ultimately reneged on payment of the negotiated salary awards.<sup>41</sup> After protracted debate, which engaged and enraged the public, teachers eventually resigned *en masse* effective at the end of 1921. The dispute was settled with the intervention of the Board of Trade, which suggested that the \$11,000 arbitration award won by teachers be reduced to \$5,000 paid with \$4,000 from the school board and \$1,000 from the city council. The teachers accepted this as winning in principle and were willing to forego the rest of the money due them. According to one analysis, "the central issue from the outset had been the right of friendly negotiation with the board. In short, the teachers believed that co-operation and recognition, essential ingredients in an improved occupational environment, were worth more than money."<sup>42</sup> Within a month, the teachers enjoyed the defeat of the unsympathetic school board in the January 22, 1922 election. In both strikes, teachers saw their employers, the local boards, as adversaries and did not direct their ire towards Willis or the Department. Although curriculum and other pedagogical concerns were administered by Victoria, provision of teachers' salaries and living accommodation were determined by local boards.

---

<sup>41</sup> The New Westminster Council's referendum to raise the funds failed to pass. The school board was then left in the awkward position of having insufficient budget to support the large salary increases granted under arbitration.

<sup>42</sup> Roald, "Pursuit of Status: Professionalism, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955", p. 94.

Although Willis would have been sympathetic to the teachers' issues, he remained aloof from the dispute which was viewed from Victoria as an issue to be resolved locally. Willis made no attempt publicly to move the issue towards resolution. Instead, he sat back as did the provincial politicians and let local officials devise a solution. Willis' *laissez-faire* approach succeeded because it was appropriate for the times when provincial government intervention would have been regarded as unexpected and intrusive. In this instance, the dispute was a local issue, and a political one. Neither of these features would require provincial government action, particularly from Willis. Nor was it expected. In the extensive coverage of the strike in the B.C. Teacher, there is no reference to the Department of Education, save for one New Westminster Trustee's suggestion that their Board resign in favour of the Department appointing an official trustee.<sup>43</sup>

### **The B.C.T.F.'s professional interests**

Teaching was a profession entirely controlled by the provincial educational bureaucracy. Indeed, Roald's thesis is that organizations formed because "teachers have attempted to escape from or at least to modify the bureaucratic environment which prescribed the conditions of their vocation."<sup>44</sup>

Although the profession had adopted a new demeanor and internal agenda, teachers were not yet overtly political. Stewart Graham spoke about efforts educators made to avoid political affiliation. He said "Dr. Willis stated repeatedly that teachers must be

---

<sup>43</sup> B.C. Teacher, 1,3 (November 1921): 2-12.

<sup>44</sup> Roald, "Pursuit of Status: Professionalism, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955", abstract.

neutral."<sup>45</sup> This applied particularly when teaching about government. Teachers were expected to give both sides without indicating any personal bias. The job of the teacher was to teach, not to proselytize. This was another social code applied to teachers, partly by society, partly by themselves. They were not expected to be active politically any more than were other civil servants.<sup>46</sup>

Although precedent was established from the time of the Teachers' Institutes that "the Superintendent of Education was almost invariably elected president,"<sup>47</sup> Willis well understood the appropriateness of holding himself to a politically neutral position separate from government officials. When he was offered, along with Minister MacLean, an honorary membership in the B.C.T.F. in 1922, both declined.<sup>48</sup> No explanation is given in the B.C.T.F. minutes concerning why the offer of membership was made. The Constitution adopted at the October 28, 1916 meeting expressly excluded department officials, school trustees and officers of boards of school trustees. It is curious, therefore, why such offers were ever made, and, for the same reason, not surprising that honorary membership was declined.

### **Willis' view of teachers in the 1920s**

Shortly after becoming Superintendent, as a fair gesture Willis ensured teachers would thenceforth be provided with copies of the reports inspectors made about them.

---

<sup>45</sup> Interview July 31, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham in New Westminster.

<sup>46</sup> This official reserve was held until the 1970s. Such caution was set aside forever in 1972 when the B.C.T.F. organized the Apple campaign. Teachers worked actively to defeat the Social Credit government. B.C.T.F. support for the opposition was integral in electing the first New Democrat government in British Columbia.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes, Executive Meeting, January 7, 1922. MacLean later had a change of heart and allowed himself to be admitted as an Honorary Member April 12, 1928.

From 1919 on, inspectors' reports were to be submitted in triplicate. One was given to the teacher, one to the school board and one to the Superintendent.<sup>49</sup> More than merely a step towards centralized and bureaucratic control, this was a significant step toward due process in teacher evaluation. This action is also indicative of Willis' sense of fairness and his adherence to Christian ethics. He had once been a teacher, and the decision to make information critical to the teacher's career available was more than a courtesy.

However, not all treatment was so positive and fair. Teachers had to contend with criticism and complaints about their work from outside the Department. Perhaps most serious was that geographically isolated teachers were without much shelter from trustee and parent criticism, making a challenging job even more difficult. Although reprimands from the Department were rare, on one notable occasion, teachers were chastised for failing to stress the virtues of legible handwriting! The stern critic was Superintendent Willis himself. Annual reports from the late 1800s contained lamentations about poor penmanship. The 1921-22 report is singular in acknowledging "marked improvement" owing, according to Willis, to the introduction that year of a booklet entitled The MacLean Method of Muscular Movement Writing. Willis remarked, "There is, of course, a large number of teachers who have not yet made any serious effort to master the new system and who, in consequence, are not getting good results."<sup>50</sup> At the May 1922 B.C.T.F. convention, Willis protested:

I do not wish to give you the impression that I wish to lay undue emphasis on the subject of writing. I do not at all. But I take the view that what is worth doing is worth doing well: and it will take no more time from the rest of our studies to do that subject in the right way than it will to do it in the wrong way, which obtained in the past.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964), p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1921-22, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1922), p. C10.

<sup>51</sup> B.C. Teacher, Convention Number (May 1922): 9.



Teachers were expected to respond to criticism and to perform according to expressed expectations such as these. Under the Putman-Weir Report's recommendations, Willis worked to apply newly learned scientific principles to a curriculum which was expected to change according to life conditions and utility. Weir expounded the view that "Scientific studies, still in their infancy, in the field of curriculum-making seek to discover that content which possesses the greatest functional value as determined by specific educational objectives and life activities."<sup>52</sup> Influences from psychology, like the "hand-eye movement" made an impact on the way such subjects as art, technical education, domestic science and handwriting were taught.

One cannot consider Willis' view of teachers without recognizing that he had empathy for their low salaries and gave priority to improving teachers' financial position. From personal experience as a former teacher and out of his principled sense of fairness, he also had empathy for the insecurity of tenure they faced. Through the 1920s and throughout his career, Willis wrote many memoranda concerning provision for rural teachers' salaries. In a May 14, 1936 memo to the Minister, Willis defended the salary requests of Prince Rupert teachers, remarking at the beginning of his communication, "It appears to me that the teachers in Prince Rupert have been treated rather shabbily."<sup>53</sup> Each year he worked out the budget and made proposals for means to raise their salaries. His campaign on their behalf would continue right up to the last year of his service.<sup>54</sup> He travelled east in the fall of 1926 to study teachers' pension schemes in effect for teachers in Quebec and Ontario, and in Manitoba on his return. He returned with "exhaustive data

---

<sup>52</sup> B.C. Teacher, 6, 3 (November 1926): 5.

<sup>53</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 8, File 3.

<sup>54</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 47, File 9 contains numerous examples of Willis' budget submissions to the Minister and to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Finance.

collected in the expectation that British Columbia will adopt a system of pensions for teachers in the next few years."<sup>55</sup>

Teachers made financial and legislative gains in the 1920s. They looked to their teachers' organizations for help in resolving disputes and for more balance in what Roald declared was "a traditional master-slave relationship" between teachers and trustees. This view may have been justified in some extreme cases, but not all trustees were abusive of teachers.<sup>56</sup> There were various ways teachers had been set upon by trustees including being held to low salaries, required to board at a certain trustee's home rather than a place of one's choosing, and subjected to invasive scrutiny of one's personal life.

The B.C. Teacher showed teachers' reciprocal regard for Willis as a fellow teacher and an honoured education official. During his trip to consult with education officials in Ontario and Quebec, McGill University conferred an honorary LL.D. degree upon Willis at the October 1926 convocation. The B.C.T.F. congratulated him and paid tribute:

Dr. Willis was a member of the B.C. Teachers' Federation previous to his present appointment, and since then he has shown himself most willing to co-operate with the teachers in all matters of educational interest, and, on all occasions, a delegation is certain of a cordial and sympathetic reception.<sup>57</sup>

In managing the system, Willis was equally concerned with teachers' preparation, classroom performance and content of the curriculum.

---

<sup>55</sup> Victoria Times, 15 October 1926:1.

<sup>56</sup> Roald, "Pursuit of Status: Professionalism, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955," p. 154.

<sup>57</sup> B.C. Teacher 6, 2 (October 1926): 6.

### The quality of schooling

Willis early made clear his wide-ranging interest in the quality of schooling across British Columbia. Formal teacher training in British Columbia was provided by the normal schools in Vancouver (established 1901) and in Victoria (established 1915). In 1919, the principals of Western Canada's normal schools met to standardize the training their institutions offered. They decided Grade 11 completion would be the minimum prerequisite for entry<sup>58</sup> and voted to standardize the normal school session at thirty-six weeks.<sup>59</sup> Willis endorsed this decision in one of the first speeches he made as the newly-appointed Superintendent of Education to the Vancouver Teachers' Association at a dinner in his honour. Willis spoke of changes he wished to make as Superintendent, particularly in rural districts which tended to hire inexperienced teachers. Willis said he preferred student teachers to arrive at normal school more schooled and older:

I am of the opinion, from observation, that the preparation for school teaching is not in this Province as extended as it should be. The students of the Normal School do not graduate with sufficient preparation for this important work, and I would like to have the question settled whether the work is not entered upon in many cases at too immature an age.<sup>60</sup>

As an adjunct to normal school courses, the University of British Columbia began regular summer sessions for teachers in 1920. Initially, these non-credit courses were general and merely informative. Two years later, U.B.C. introduced standard courses in summer session, making it possible for teachers to earn degrees through part-time study.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*, p. 78. Johnson explained that normal school faculty were the first arbiters of admission, and later an examination was set for potential students who did not have any "educational certificate or qualification."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> *The Colonist*, 7 December 1919:2.

<sup>61</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, *Annual Report*, 1921-1922, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1922), p. C12.

The Department of Education authorized four classes of teaching certificates (granted on a permanent, interim or temporary basis). By 1922, the minimum qualifications to obtain each were completion of teacher training plus:

Academic	University degree
First Class	Senior Matriculation
Second Class	Junior Matriculation
Special Certificate	(no academic requirements as these applied to commercial subjects, domestic science, manual training) <sup>62</sup>

Since remuneration was tied to individual teacher's levels of academic achievement, encouraging them to raise their qualifications was one way Willis could justify salary increases.

During the 1920s, the Department encouraged teachers to move away from teaching by the rote method and instead to concentrate on more active learning experiences. This was a direct consequence of the child-study movement and the ascendancy of experimental psychology worldwide. New understandings of children and their developmental requirements guaranteed introduction of such new learning methods as the project method of instruction in the classroom.

Willis' annual report for 1923-24 announced completion of the curriculum revision for elementary schools,<sup>63</sup> and the following year Willis turned his attention to assessing

<sup>62</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1922-1923, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1923), p. F 11. This report contained the announcement that normal school tuition would no longer be free. A tuition of \$40.00 was imposed with the explanation "It has been the practice in nearly all other Provinces and countries to require students to contribute to the cost of the maintenance of the schools at which they receive training for the teaching service." The Department calculated that this tuition would recover about thirty per cent of the cost of maintaining the normal schools.

<sup>63</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1923-24, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1924), p. T10.

pupils' preparedness for high school entrance. The subjects normally covered in the high school admission examination previously had been confined to Arithmetic, Grammar, Composition, Geography, Drawing, Penmanship, Dictation and Spelling. Willis had his inspectors administer additional special tests to 5,000 pupils during March and June. The subjects covered were Canadian History, British History, Hygiene and Nature Study. The testing had been prompted by inspectors' reports to Department officials that these areas of the curriculum were not receiving adequate attention. It was deemed that schools which scored an average number of correct answers per pupil of 50% in the four areas were doing fair work. In the tables provided with the annual report, only 24 of the 114 schools listed fell below the passing grade of 117 correct out of 235 questions.<sup>64</sup> The Department was open to curriculum enrichment and expansion. This received particular attention from Willis who actively took on curriculum development as its helmsman.

### Curriculum

Willis' reputation as a curriculum reformer was well established even before his appointment November 3, 1919 as Superintendent of Education. This was demonstrated when the B.C.T.F.'s executive committee met July 17, 1919. Curriculum was one matter under consideration. They had to respond to then- Superintendent Alexander Robinson's request for B.C.T.F. representatives to join committees appointed to revise the public school and high school textbooks. The minutes record that "Mr. S.J. Willis, of Vancouver and Mr. A.G. Smith, of Victoria, were appointed."<sup>65</sup> There was no extended discussion. The nominations implied that these two educators were the "reigning experts" in each city.

---

<sup>64</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1924-25, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), pp. M16 - M19.

<sup>65</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes, Executive Committee, 17 July 1919, p. 3, B.C.T.F. Archives and Records, Vancouver.

A few months later, Willis was at the top of the education bureaucracy and ideally situated to act on his concerns for the curriculum. The Department introduced new subjects. Of these Tomkins argued that "manual training, domestic science, agriculture (including nature study) and health and physical education were the most important."<sup>66</sup> The first technical courses offered in British Columbia high schools had been introduced in the 1916-17 school year. Domestic science, the application of scientific methods to homemaking, was introduced in tandem to keep girls occupied while the boys were involved in shop classes. The training proved popular, and Willis carried on making this training available. By 1920, twenty-nine domestic science centres had been established in the province.<sup>67</sup> Even Agriculture was being transformed from a theoretical subject to an active, practical course. All the while, such studies were to inculcate "a positive viewpoint concerning country life, the recognition of virtues immanent in the work of the soil and the acknowledgement and application of the individual's power over nature."<sup>68</sup> Eventually, the agriculture course was not a success, mainly because of the rapid turnover of teachers, who were not necessarily equipped to teach the subject. Its desirability as a school subject was also diminished by the objections of parents who thought that a rural curriculum would narrow opportunities for their children that they hoped urban-oriented education would provide.

Willis took a direct part in British Columbia's curriculum review. B.C.T.F. representatives met frequently to bring their curriculum issues to the Superintendent's attention. B.C.T.F. executive meeting minutes regularly featured reports on how Willis

<sup>66</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986), p. 115.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

had received their suggestions. One example concerns a report on a January 16, 1926 meeting between Willis and G.W. Clark. This time the subject was a new course outline for English, together with the B.C.T.F.'s recommendations for replacing textbooks. Clark reported that the plan "was cordially received by the Superintendent." Characteristically, though, Willis had practical interest. The minutes record that the Superintendent

expressed appreciation for the suggestions and (gave) the assurance that if the suggested books will be in print in September, in all likelihood they will be prescribed as requested. He demurred at some of the minor changes requested with regard to Supplementary Reading, on the score of the possible difficulty of securing cheap enough editions of the suggested books, but expressed his willingness to investigate and make the changes if practical."<sup>69</sup>

Willis was committed to upholding the aims of Progressivism, and was well positioned in the educational hierarchy to ensure that appropriate curriculum choices would be made. Willis was willing to adapt courses of study, but as the quote illustrates, with an eye to the cost implications of any such change. There were no obvious or consistently recurring curriculum policies emanating from the B.C.T.F. Rather, their recommendations appear to have been carefully worked and plans arrived at through consensus at each annual convention.

After the 1928 election, the Reverend Canon Joshua Hinchliffe was appointed Minister of Education. Teachers had been negotiating since 1920 for a pension plan. In October 1928, Premier Tolmie met with a delegation from the B.C.T.F. to discuss the question of superannuation. Although sympathetic, he said the government did not have a large sum of money to commit, but promised to take it up in Cabinet.<sup>70</sup> By December, the

<sup>69</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes, Executive Meeting, March 13, 1926, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> B.C. Teacher, 7, 8 (April 1928): 37. The B.C.T.F. expressed gratitude to Minister Hinchliffe and "to the Government officials also we are deeply grateful for their splendid assistance in the detailed work involved in the preparation of the Bill" in the B.C. Teacher, 7, 7 (March 1929):3.

B.C.T.F. had ready a draft "Teachers' Superannuation Bill". The Teachers' Pensions Act was passed by the provincial Legislature in March 1929, coming into operation April 1, 1929.

### **Rural Conditions**

Although there is ample evidence that Willis was sensitive about and committed to improving rural teachers' salaries, it is questionable whether he was truly aware of their plight. Two files of Teachers' Bureau records from 1923 and 1928 survive in the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, containing teachers' original handwritten reports, together with photographs of most of the schools. Although some responses are cautious and vague -- designed not to offend -- many teachers availed themselves of the opportunity to make candid replies to the survey concerning the conditions they faced. Both sets of records have been carefully analyzed by Wilson, who enumerated teachers' problems: "Loneliness, isolation, difficult and unfriendly trustees, parents, and landlords confronted many teachers."<sup>71</sup> Their inescapable reality was geographical isolation. An added burden was the problem of housing, usually requiring teachers to board miles away, necessitating a difficult daily journey to the schoolhouse. Psychological isolation sometimes derived from social and political factions created by parents and trustees. This could be compounded by assignment to any of the ethnic communities where schools were attended predominantly by children who spoke little or no English, being variously of Finnish, Japanese, Russian or other descent. The province's population was so thinly scattered that, as a consequence,

---

<sup>71</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "'I am here to help if you need me': British Columbia's Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, 1928-1934," Journal of Canadian Studies 25, 2 (Summer 1990), p. 97.



many school rosters were small. Throughout the 1920s, about twenty per cent of British Columbia's school children attended small, typically one-room schools.<sup>72</sup>

Descriptions of classrooms survive in teachers' diaries, correspondence to the Department, and in local histories. A particularly graphic depiction was provided by Miss E. M. Bruneau who began teaching at Bouchie Lake in the Cariboo district in 1922. She recalled opening the school with seventeen pupils in a small log building:

There was very little equipment in the school...just one small piece of blackboard. The stove in the centre of the room kept us all cozy. Whoever arrived first had the chore of lighting the fire. The children had long distances to walk, and often brought their dogs with them. I allowed these dogs to be inside out of the cold. This, I remember, was strongly disapproved of by the Inspector. In summer there were no screens on the doors or windows, and when the mosquitoes were bad, we had to keep a smudge burning in the room.<sup>73</sup>

Discouraged, many teachers sought to move on to a new school. Turnover was regarded as a detriment to efficient operation of the schools, and was lamented by inspectors. One example is found in the comments of Inspector Matthews who contrasted that disrupting experience with schools which enjoyed the continuity of the same teacher over several years. He detected higher quality work and marked progress whenever teachers remained long enough.<sup>74</sup> This did not go unnoticed by Willis who saw fit to include mention of this in the 1921-22 Annual Report. It no doubt firmed his resolve to make rural teaching attractive and thus to extend the average length of tenure.

---

<sup>72</sup> Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," p. 2. Information was calculated from statistical tables.

<sup>73</sup> Marion Booth, ed., Pioneers of Bouchie Lake (Bouchie Lake: Bouchie Lake Women's Institute, 1975), p. 31.

<sup>74</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1921-1922 ((Victoria: King's Printer, 1922), p. C33.

The conditions for teachers were as varied as the people accepting those positions. Not all places were unwelcoming and confrontational. The Cariboo district was renowned for being pleasant and inviting. Many teachers who came there between 1919 and 1925 stayed on in the area. Former teacher and community activist Hazel Huckvale recalled that teacher turnover was due more to marriage in an era when women were expected to retire and leave their jobs to others needing work:

Teachers were treated like royalty. A teacher in the Cariboo was treated with the greatest respect and consideration....There was always a great deal of teacher turnover. The local ranchers' sons married the teachers, so we had turnover about every two years.<sup>75</sup>

The unevenness of the teaching experience throughout the province likely caused Willis and other officials to regard the living conditions as local issues -- and allowed them to abdicate responsibility for alleviating teachers' hardships. There was a benign neglect of unfavourable local conditions.

Willis seldom got the opportunity to see local conditions first-hand. Apart from the constraints of the job, this was due to his aversion to travel. Graham explained: "Dr. Willis just would not leave Victoria. He didn't go out at all. Now, I was told that he had never gone to open a school or anything like that." Graham did manage to convince Willis to open the Creston Valley High School. It was a positive experience for him, and the teachers tried hard to impress him:

I said to the Commercial teacher, "You take Dr. Willis' speech down in shorthand." We didn't have tape recorders in those days. "Get it transcribed as quickly as you can, and I'll stall the conclusion of the ceremonies." Which I did. As the platform party with Dr. Willis and myself leading it, marched down with the band playing, we marched down the aisle and out the door from the auditorium. The *Creston Highlights* was handed to Dr. Willis with the headline in his speech there. He was *flabbergasted*. I think that's what made me the Inspector of

---

<sup>75</sup> Interview August 1, 1983 by Valerie Giles with Hazel Huckvale.

Schools! He just couldn't believe it! As far as I know, that's the only time he left Victoria.<sup>76</sup>

The Teachers' Bureau reports demonstrated that teachers' living accommodations varied widely. Literally any available structure became the teacher's home -- "a farmhouse, ranchhouse, old school, teacherage attached to the school, hotel, post office, railroad station or section house, cook shack, remodelled warehouse, or hospital."<sup>77</sup> The poor accommodation largely contributed to teacher turnover.<sup>78</sup> Prominent educator and author of the 1923 survey of high schools, Norman Fergus Black, described rural school problems in a 1924 essay for the B.C. Teacher. He discussed and described the "calamitously frequent change of teachers" as a major problem.<sup>79</sup> Acknowledging low salaries as one of the confounding factors in keeping teachers in rural postings, Black looked beyond that for another explanation. He concluded from teachers' comments that there was indeed a profound underlying reason for the problem. It was simply that "teachers of our rural schools were never trained for rural school teaching."<sup>80</sup>

Although sympathetic towards rural teachers, as in his attempts to improve their salaries, Willis was constrained by lack of resources. Through the 1920s and 1930s, even basic instructional materials were in short supply. A school could afford only what the Department provided. Most of the rural schools were classified as *assisted* which meant that the costs of the school building, supplies and equipment and even the teacher's salary

---

<sup>76</sup> Interview July 31, 1993 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> BCARS, GR 461, Teachers' Bureau, "School District Information Forms."

<sup>79</sup> The B.C. Teacher, 3, 10, (June 1924), p. 226.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

came from government funds. More prosperous areas, incorporated into municipalities or cities, had a tax base from which to draw taxes to support schools.

\* \* \*

The first five years of Willis' service as Superintendent should then be understood in light of social circumstances and professional trends in education. At the beginning of the interwar period, educators and politicians faced expectations for a bright future and increasing economic opportunities. Teachers were aiming to control their working conditions and to influence curricula. They became organized and sought to have more say in developing policies and management procedures in schooling.

Willis was receptive to input from teachers. He responded annually to the recommendations passed at B.C.T.F. conventions and met regularly with their executive. He was willing to change text books or curricula in response to good arguments for doing so, and thus accorded teachers' leaders a very real opportunity to influence curricula. All of this input helped the public perception of the Department and Deputy as responsive, but it meant no lessening of the central control Willis maintained.

The evidence cited previously shows that Willis sought to be kind in his dealings with teachers and the B.C.T.F., but remained somewhat unaware of, or hesitant to acknowledge, the distress of teachers serving in the far reaches of the province. That the situation was never truly remedied presents consideration that Victoria officials were oblivious or unconcerned. Despite this, Willis managed to establish a solid foundation of respect among the teaching profession in his first half-decade.

---

## Chapter 4

### Social and Educational Change: 1925 - 1939

*...the changing systems required by the times...<sup>1</sup>*

#### THE MEANING OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

In the late nineteenth century, curriculum was shaped to a considerable degree by theories of mental discipline, thought to have both practical and moral value for learning. Among other influences on the curriculum were the imperatives of cultural survival, economic needs, and such Victorian values as temperance, loyalty to the monarch, the work ethic and social restraint.<sup>2</sup> From another perspective, Curtis opined that capitalists and the professional class became concerned that public regulation was needed to preserve "respect for property, political authority and Christian religion." Those groups looked to the school system as the venue for the type of public instruction they deemed necessary.<sup>3</sup> All of these influences combined to form the context in which Willis operated as Superintendent and Deputy Minister. They deserve scrutiny because of their influence on educational issues and expectations.

Proponents of Progressive education had children study a broad general curriculum in the lower grades, switching to concentration on classical subjects at the high school level. The classics were considered suitable for those planning to attend college, or to assume a teaching career. For others, it was thought that a basic education was all that

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria Times, 27 February 1947:4. Editorial tribute on the occasion of a reception organized to honour Dr. Willis on February 23, 1947.

<sup>2</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Curtis, True Government By Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 34-35.

was "requisite for the ordinary duties of life."<sup>4</sup> Within a few decades, the influence of psychology -- then emerging as a new academic discipline -- rivaled formalism in dictating acceptable learning styles.

Anglo-Canadians worried, however, that American influence was threatening the Canadian economy and culture. American periodicals outsold Canadian ones and were influencing patterns of speech and expression. Across the country new immigrants of "alien stock" were required to adopt Anglo-Canadian ways, and schools were expected to supplant foreign language and culture with majority norms. Tomkins noted that Anglo-conformism was at its height during the First World War.<sup>5</sup>

Another growing concern was children's health, and health officials influenced curricula by making health instruction and physical education compulsory subjects in schools. This involvement in children's health opened the way for the mental health movement and the institutionalization of mental measurement practices in schools.

Pressure for curriculum reform also came from various groups settling in rural British Columbia, many of them farmers, who wanted better formal education for their children -- at least equal to that offered in urban centres. On the prairies, populations of central and eastern Europeans resisted notions that their children needed to be educated. But once they agreed, they demanded instruction in their native languages rather than in English. They also wanted their culture and family traditions emphasized.<sup>6</sup> Immigrants

---

<sup>4</sup> Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> J.T.M. Anderson, The Education of the New-Canadian: A Treatise on Canada's Greatest Educational Problem (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Ltd., 1918), pp. 217 - 221.

overcame apprehension about having their children taught by "outsiders" and began to regard learning as valuable for their children's future benefit. Establishment of schools in religious communities like the Mennonites also received attention from Willis until acceptance of schooling was certain. This transformation among immigrant populations to accept school and tolerate the dominant culture was assisted by rising Canadian nationalism. Stamp quoted comments from a 1910 speech on "The Canadianization of Western Canada" wherein the speaker announced that schoolchildren "sing the patriotic songs of Britain and Canada and the reading books are full of patriotic selections. There is no honour more regarded by these young foreigners than to be called Canadian." Turn-of-the-century school curricula were influenced by introduction of patriotic activities and themes such as "allegiance-pledging, and patriotic song-singing and poetry-reading."<sup>7</sup>

*Progressive education* was variously a concept, a movement, and an identifiable period in educational history. One American historian pointed out the definitional problem. The word "progressive" fell into common parlance as a flattering term for innovations with which one agreed or approved. With some humour, Zilversmit mused:

According to this definition any change can be seen as "progressive" if it accords with someone's sense of the direction of historical development, and the term has often been used in this broad sense. Thus, the installation of flush toilets in school buildings is a "progressive" step.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, Zilversmit subscribed to a narrower definition which became prevalent amongst schoolmen of the 1920s and 1930s. A *progressive* school was identified as one that followed a child-centred rather than a subject-centred curriculum; allowed children to play

---

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Stamp, "Education and the Economic and Social Milieu: The English-Canadian Scene from the 1870s to 1914," in J. Donald Wilson, ed., Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970) p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Zilversmit, "The Failure of Progressive Education, 1920-1940," in Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education, ed. Lawrence Stone (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 254.

an active role in determining the content of their education; was concerned with meeting the needs of the "whole child" -- emotional, physical and intellectual, in the belief that producing happy and responsible people would enhance the larger society.

Interest in Progressive education was nation-wide across Canada, and Canada's educators, including Willis, were influenced by pronouncements of prominent American educators. In Canada an organization calling itself "The Progressive Education Association" was founded in 1919. Its tenets included that pupils should develop naturally; the motivation for all work undertaken should be interest; teachers should act as guides, not task masters; pupil development should become a more scientific study; and that educators should pay attention to discover the influence on a child of his environment.<sup>9</sup>

Cremin's pronouncement that Progressivism meant "different things to different people"<sup>10</sup> was as true for British Columbians as it was elsewhere in North America. In educational terms, Progressivism had a quicksilver quality -- rising and falling in significance over time and place throughout the province. For most of the period that Willis served as Superintendent he coped with issues and problems concerning Progressivism. Willis had come into the Superintendent's office at a time when the Progressive movement created great expectation for change in education. He was himself a Progressive and supported the movement. Willis and the teachers were eager to see

---

<sup>9</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "Society and Education During the Wars and Their Interlude 1914 - 1945," in Canadian Education: A History, ed. J. Donald Wilson (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970), p. 373.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, The Transformation of the School (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. x. See also Jean Mann "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?" in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1980), pp. 91-92. Mann describes Progressivism as a "Many-faceted movement" each wave of which "was intimately and intricately related to the economic, political and social conditions of its time and place."



improvements to the school system, new and expanded curricula, provision for vocational education, establishment of junior high schools and greater options for high school students generally, but especially for rural students.

The annual reports show a sequence of attempts at Progressive innovation in British Columbia. The year 1921-22 saw introduction of new textbooks, replacing those in use since the turn of the century. Manual training was being conducted in 79 centres and domestic science in 51.<sup>11</sup> A school for the deaf and dumb was opened at Oak and 24th Avenue in Vancouver. In 1923-24 there was a revision of the Elementary School course, involving production of a manual with detailed suggestions for teaching each subject. The Survey of the education system was announced. Putman and Weir were given a mandate "to look into questions of school finance, school administration, training of teachers, courses of study, as well as all other phases of our educational system."<sup>12</sup> Production of the manual was important in imparting notions of what was involved in varying the teaching approach away from basic learning from the textbook.

In the next year, 1924-25, music became an elective subject in high schools with the proviso that students "may now select music as an optional subject in lieu of geometry, botany, agriculture, physics or chemistry." Students had to receive lessons privately and be possessed of sufficient talent "to make success probable," but now had the opportunity to study one of the creative arts.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1921-22, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1922), p. C10.

<sup>12</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1923-24, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1924), p. T10.

<sup>13</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1924-25, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), p. M10.

## THE PUTMAN-WEIR REPORT

Canadian reactions against the academic formalism imposed by a centrally-administered system had begun to appear at the end of the nineteenth century in the popular press and newspaper articles. Proponents of an educational experience that would engage children and inspire their abilities and interests -- the Progressives -- were beginning to have impact. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, they were supported by child psychologists and other major forces in the Progressive movement.<sup>14</sup>

It was time to make an assessment of the education system in British Columbia, where schools were then a half century old. In 1924, with Willis as Superintendent, J.H. Putman and George Weir were commissioned to undertake a thorough survey of the school system. This was timely, not only because of increasing public concern about the cost of supporting the education system, but because of the school system's tremendous growth. Between 1902 and 1922, the school population had almost quadrupled.<sup>15</sup>

The idea of conducting a system-wide school survey arose from the B.C.T.F.'s 1922 convention, and the Department implicitly acknowledged teacher leadership in announcing the survey at their 1924 convention. The government kept back the announcement until June 1924 to benefit from the publicity during the election campaign. This survey was designed to be an exhaustive one. Willis would have played a major role

---

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Lawr and Robert Gidney, eds., Educating Canadians: A Documentary History of Public Education (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1973), p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> British Columbia, One Hundred Years: Education in British Columbia (Victoria: Department of Education, 1971), Table; British Columbia Public School Enrolments 1872-1971, p. 68.

either in recommending or approving the choice of commissioners.<sup>16</sup> Both commissioners were educators with national reputations -- and obvious choices to give the work appropriate cachet and clout. The commissioners had to be government and department outsiders to keep the appearance of impartiality.

At the beginning of the fall 1924 school term, the B.C.T.F. urged its local associations to prepare submissions to the Putman-Weir survey on such professional concerns as living conditions, tenure, and pensions.<sup>17</sup> Teachers were aware of American experiments with child-centred learning techniques, the international fascination with "the New Education," and the efficiency movement. With the provincial government's encouragement, the whole education system was to be opened to review. The B.C.T.F. even urged teachers to say whether the Department of Education should be centrally administered. The government had extended an invitation to rewrite the entire educational enterprise. If nothing else were certain, there would be change. When completed, it was to Willis that the report was presented in 1925.

Putman and Weir made recommendations about the entire system, including a significant one on administration: that local superintendents be appointed, ostensibly as a means of decentralizing school administration. Practically, it meant the government would be able to exert more control in those districts large enough to warrant superintendent appointments. Tomkins described the survey's proposed bureaucratic model as "a kind of centralized decentralization that became the standard Canadian pattern."<sup>18</sup> The Survey

---

<sup>16</sup> F. Henry Johnson noted that "Dr. Putman's name had been proposed to the Minister of Education by J.W. Gibson, the Director of Agricultural Education, who had known him in Ottawa."

<sup>17</sup> B.C. Teacher 4, 1 (September 1924): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum, p. 252.

expressed strong support for the application, system-wide, of the principles of Progressivism.

The child should be taught, as a child, in terms of the life about him, in which he is an active and interested participant...Education is life, not a mere preparation for life consisting in the memorization of facts and principles and the mastery of a formal curriculum.<sup>19</sup>

American philosopher and educational theorist John Dewey's "learning by doing" approach to curriculum design had become the watchword of the Progressive education movement. Curiously, Putman and Weir did not quote directly from Dewey's writings, nor did Willis mention Dewey. Instead, as Mann observed, they "freely acknowledged their debt to American theory and practice"<sup>20</sup> and produced "essentially a conservative document."<sup>21</sup> The authors expressed traditional views about the proper aims and objectives of education. Specifically, they believed education should contribute to a carefully planned and controlled social progress and provide moral guidance to the younger generation, thereby enabling them to become productive moral citizens. The authors were especially cognizant of the place education had in society. Their view of progressivism did not emphasize individualism at the expense of others. Both authors saw themselves as Progressive, and their suggestions aligned with the tenets of child-centred learning. Putman's biographer acknowledged that, although he embraced and promoted Progressive

---

<sup>19</sup> British Columbia. Education Survey Commission. Survey of the School System, Chairmen, J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir. (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), pp. 40 and 44.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Mann, "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?," in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980), p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

reforms, he was philosophically a conservative whose sensibilities were rooted in British values, Christian idealism, and pragmatism.<sup>22</sup>

Any departure from familiar methods and curriculum implied an increase in department size was needed. Sheer logistics dictated that more inspectors be appointed. At the time of the survey, the full complement of school inspectors for British Columbia was merely twenty-two. They oversaw 3,000 teachers, 92,000 students and 12% of the provincial budget.<sup>23</sup> Besides, more civil servants and inspectors could help create a pool from which to draw official trustees and otherwise to provide strong local leadership.

School officials had to cope with providing the educational, counselling and social services promoted by the Putman-Weir Report. Equally, personnel had to deal with an increasingly professional teaching force. On the subject of the new role for inspectors,<sup>24</sup> Willis declared:

The point of view of inspection has changed considerably. Now perhaps more than at any time, the Inspector is the teacher's guide, helper and friend. He is not chiefly a person sent to appraise and perhaps criticize the teacher's work. I was pleased that at the last session of the Legislature an amendment was made whereby an Inspector is required to give one report only each year. The common practice is for the Inspector early in the term to visit the schools of the younger and inexperienced teachers to help them with such advice and good counsel as their training and experience enables them to offer.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> B. Anne Wood, Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985). See especially Chapter Eight, "Putman-Weir Survey".

<sup>23</sup> British Columbia, One Hundred Years: Education in British Columbia, passim.

<sup>24</sup> Inspectors performed a supervisory role, and the traditional title was used up until 1958, when the Public Schools Act was amended and the title changed from "Inspector of Schools" to "District Superintendent". The role of the District Superintendent became a purely administrative one with the 1973 legislative changes which permitted local hiring of the Superintendent in each District.

<sup>25</sup> BCARS, GR 139, File 76-G-69, Vol. 4.

Logically, providing such intensive supervision would point to the necessity of increasing the inspectorate.

If the Putman-Weir survey were indeed the "roadmap" Willis declared it to be in the 1925-26 Annual Report, then it was necessarily instructive in the form of its implementation. Putman and Weir were strong advocates for new education aims and practices. They supported the concept of child-centred practices. The programmes represented contemporary innovations in the United States of America with less emphasis on academics and more on civics, current events and projects.

Overall, Putman and Weir exhorted educators and the public to allow modern educational theories to supplant the doctrine of formal discipline. Specifically, Putman and Weir wanted more emphasis on sewing, manual training, civics, physical education and health, including sex education for adolescents.<sup>26</sup> All of these initiatives enjoyed Willis' support.

Callahan's "cult of efficiency"<sup>27</sup> had taken hold, and education was being operated in a style more closely resembling a business. The Putman-Weir survey was extensive and the commissioners had received input from all educationists and interested lobby groups. For British Columbia's education system, there was now a fresh challenge. Willis and the politicians respectfully accepted their report and began implementing, at least at the official level, many of the recommendations.

---

<sup>26</sup> British Columbia, Survey of the School System, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), preface.

**Willis' response to the Putman-Weir Report**

Willis supported the Putman-Weir report's Progressive recommendations reflecting acceptance of "new education" goals. A hint that not all relations with the Department of Education were consistently cordial or co-operative is contained in the motion passed at the B.C.T.F.'s May 29, 1926 executive meeting:

That this Association would deem it a favour if the Department of Education, before introducing changes in curricula or in matters of internal administration of the schools, could see its way clear to consult with representative teachers of the B.C.T.F. who might be willing to assist the Department in introducing such changes to the best possible advantage.

This concern was likely a reaction to fear that wholesale change would occur following the Putman-Weir survey recommendations. A note followed the motion, indicating that it was favourably received with a notation "It is in practice now to a large extent."<sup>28</sup>

Although not in the habit of making political statements, Willis defended the government's education budget in a speech to the B.C.T.F.'s eighth annual convention in 1926. Speaking on the interminable subject of educational finance, he told the audience that he looked forward to the introduction of the Putman-Weir Report proposals that would relieve the municipalities and rural districts from what he described as "excessive" school tax rates. He spoke further to inform them that the monies allocated to education comprised 18.4% of the province's overall budget. While admitting that was a large amount, he declared that "when the people of the Province found no handicap from expenditure of \$13.5 million for alcoholic beverages, no complaint should be made at an expenditure of \$8 million on education."<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes, Executive Meeting, May 29, 1926, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Victoria Times, 19 April 1927:3.

Willis remarked to the 1927 B.C.T.F. convention that he had been aware of the public's call for more scientific study of education to which appointment of the Putman-Weir commission was the government's response. In the 1924-25 Public Schools Report Willis wrote a section on the Putman-Weir Survey, heralding their report as "a chart of progress for the next decade."<sup>30</sup> The tenets of Progressivism thereby had gained high-level approval from Willis and the government.

Acknowledging that many recommendations had already been effected, Willis continued his annual report comments by indicating that he anticipated the imminent adoption of proposals which would benefit rural areas "to give financial relief to municipal and rural districts where the tax rate for schools is now excessive." Willis expressed awareness of the instructional needs of rural teachers and their schools. Throughout his career, he spoke enthusiastically about enriching the curriculum and making schools more relevant and appealing. In the same 1927 convention speech just mentioned, he expressed personal satisfaction that recently introduced curriculum changes had resulted in a 40% increase in school attendance overall, and fully 47% in rural areas in the seven years since the 1919-20 attendance figures were recorded. He was pleased at the great increase in high school student numbers, "notable especially in the rural districts."<sup>31</sup> Since it was part of Willis' agenda to implement the Putman-Weir recommendations, he was naturally concerned that public support be behind the cause.

The Department also paid attention to schooling at the lower levels. The Putman-Weir Report recommended that junior high schools become one of the Progressives' solutions in British Columbia. This was particularly favoured by Willis, who believed

---

<sup>30</sup> British Columbia, Annual Report, 1924-1925, p. M10.

<sup>31</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 19 April 1927, p. 1.



creation of separate junior high schools was well worth the added cost. The Victoria Daily Times reported:

Dr. Willis advocated early and general adoption of the Junior High School system, considering that municipalities would be justified, by results, in increasing the expenses involved.<sup>32</sup>

In 1926-27, the first junior high schools were established. A programme of studies was prepared during the year and four junior high schools were in operation; the first at Penticton opened in September 1926, followed by three in Greater Vancouver at Kitsilano, Templeton and Point Grey. The programme was developed by a committee, acting with the Superintendent of Education, and comprised the principals of the four new junior high schools and the high school inspectors. Technical schools offering training were opened at Vancouver, New Westminster, Victoria and Point Grey.

Willis hailed establishment of the junior high schools in the 1926-27 Annual Report as "a change fraught with great possibilities for the future." The previously existing eight-year elementary and four-year high school programme allowed for no transition between those schools. The junior high school was to be the end point of schooling for some, and to prepare better those going on to secondary studies. Although Willis supported this change, and continued to advocate junior high schools as an important organizational and pedagogical change in the school system, he was cautious that, wherever attempted, their establishment should be done well. They should not merely fall in with the current trend. He emphasized this in the report's summary remarks:

It is well, however, that Boards of School Trustees should not rush hurriedly into the establishment of junior high schools. They should make sure that they already have in their service or can secure principals and teachers who understand the junior high school ideal and are sympathetic with the aims and purposes of the school, and

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

are also conversant with the organization and administration of successful junior high schools in other places.<sup>33</sup>

The establishment of two levels of secondary studies had a direct influence on the teaching profession. In the spirit of Progressivism teachers began to adapt and to retrain. At mid-decade, the Putman-Weir Report also urged changes in the normal school programme. The authors believed emphasis should be on "the psychology of school subjects and educational measurement rather than on methods of teaching."<sup>34</sup> The Department under Willis responded to the Putman-Weir recommendations and the normal school curriculum was expanded over the next five years. Johnson records that:

New appointments were made to provide more competent instruction in the fields of educational psychology, measurement and history of education. A course for women students in Nutrition and Home Economics was offered at both normal schools.<sup>35</sup>

Although adoption of the new fields was accomplished administratively, the actual adaptation to the classroom was slow. The main reason for resistance was the familiarity of formalism which carried on well into the "Progressive era."<sup>36</sup>

These modifications in teacher training became noteworthy enough to prompt Willis to mention in the 1928-29 Public Schools Report "the gradual strengthening of the academic qualifications of teachers-in-training at the normal schools. Over 54 per cent of those in attendance at Victoria last year had considerably more than the minimum

---

<sup>33</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1926-27, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1927), p. M12.

<sup>34</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964), p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 213. These additions as well as new normal school courses in hygiene, folk-dancing and organized games were mentioned in the Annual Report for 1926-27, p. M13.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver From the 1920s to the 1960s." BC Studies 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986): 175-210.

requirements for admission."<sup>37</sup> Some had two years' university credits and many had senior matriculation standing. Willis upheld the importance of improving teacher qualifications because, apart from the obvious beneficial effect better-prepared teachers would have on the system, it would also cause their salaries to increase.

The Department was particularly concerned with strengthening high school education because it formed the basis of future academic work and teacher training. By 1927-28, Willis reported that "the majority of the School Boards are doing everything possible to provide modern and adequate facilities for classroom service."<sup>38</sup>

The next year, 1928-29, the Department announced a revision of the high school curriculum. This was an extension of the work already begun in previous years to enrich the elementary and junior high school programmes. In his report Willis declared that students were being overwhelmed by the number of subjects and were either leaving school early or having to repeat the grade. The Department announced the revision would be ready by Easter 1930, and then printed and distributed it to all high schools. Prominent among the reasons Willis had for revising the high school curriculum was that the university and the normal schools considered entry-level students were too immature and insufficiently prepared in three years of high school. At the June 1929 meeting of the Council of Public Instruction (a body, comprised of the Premier and cabinet, charged with setting policy for education), Education Minister Hinchliffe read a memorandum from Willis presenting the case for a four-year high school course to follow Grade 8. The desirability of extending the course was obvious to teachers who believed the workload was

---

<sup>37</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1928-29, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1929), p. R11.

<sup>38</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1927-28, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1928), p. V18.

"altogether too heavy for the conscientious student" in three years. The Council approved unanimously the Willis proposal for a four-year high school course.<sup>39</sup> Bright students who wished to accelerate quickly were to be allowed to graduate in three years.

The considered changes to high school curricula did not go unnoticed outside the province. One early measure of the success that "Progressive" techniques and curriculum changes were making as they were applied in British Columbia high schools had come in the form of external approval. Approbation of the value of this education came in 1927 when Oxford University accepted British Columbia junior and senior matriculation certificates. This meant that British Columbia high school graduates would be able to enter Oxford without special examinations. Education Minister MacLean declared Oxford's recognition as "one of the most striking tributes ever paid to the British Columbia education system."<sup>40</sup> Teachers were getting desirable results; they were being "effective." The recognition also represented yet another demonstration of the close imperial links which persisted between British Columbia and the United Kingdom. In no small way, it was a compliment to Willis and his ability to balance traditional and Progressive offerings in the provincial school system.

Willis also took on the cause of revamping the curriculum. Championing the four-year high school programme in 1929 was a major change, but he was also involved in approving choice of textbooks. Willis had been invited to serve as the B.C.T.F.

<sup>39</sup> Minutes of Meetings of The Council of Public Instruction, 17 June 1929. The minutes were handwritten, recorded by Willis as Secretary of the Council. The Willis memo is not extant. However, Willis mentions this event later on in speech notes written in 1934. He acknowledged that the first 4-year graduates matriculated in 1933. Willis noted that "As yet a High School Graduation Diploma obtained on a principal's recommendation is not accepted as a certificate of qualification for admission to the local university or to one of the Provincial normal schools." Record located in the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, File GR 139, 76-G-69, Vol. 4. (October 1934), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> BCARS, File GR 0467, Vol. 2 (1920-1931), p. 101. December 1927.

representative to the Education Department in 1919 for consideration of high school texts. Once he became Superintendent, the B.C.T.F.'s concerns respecting curriculum and textbooks continued to be directed to him.<sup>41</sup> The February 1930 edition of B.C. Teacher announced that the subject of Willis' address to their convention would be "Curriculum Changes."

By 1929, Willis let it be known that he was taking a strong stand to protect teachers from unfair treatment at the hands of rural school board trustees. Willis mentioned to a committee of M.L.A.s meeting to discuss public accounts that "it had become the settled policy of the Department of Education that, should a rural school board indulge in improper criticism of a teacher, the board would be removed and an official trustee appointed." He commented further that this "had been found the best way to deal with such cases."<sup>42</sup>

Former B.C.T.F. President, Bernard Gillie, remembers that in the late 1920s there was concern about young female teachers being posted alone to remote rural schools. He recalled one teacher was murdered in a small community outside Prince Rupert. Wilson and Stortz also mentioned this case in their study of teacher isolation. The murder of Miss Chisholm occurred in May 1926. The case was never solved, nor was the motive ever known.<sup>43</sup> Another teacher in the Cowichan Lake district committed suicide after being criticized and harassed by her trustees. A strong outcry followed, both from the public and from the teaching profession. Both of these incidents drew dramatic attention to the vulnerability of young women teaching and living alone. The direct result was the

<sup>41</sup> B.C.T.F. Minutes, 13 March 1926.

<sup>42</sup> Morning Star, 20 February 1929, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> J. Donald Wilson and Paul J. Stortz, "'May the Lord Have Mercy on You' The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," BC Studies 79 (Autumn 1988), p. 42 and note.

appointment of Miss Lottie Bowron as the Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer in late 1928. Gillie believed the inspiration for this appointment was S.J. Willis and that it was Willis' doing. "I would bet, although I couldn't prove it, that Willis was behind it. He certainly approved it."<sup>44</sup>

Miss Bowron's responsibility was to travel throughout the remote regions of the province to act as a companion, advisor and helpmate to young women teachers. As travel was arduous, and since it was not physically possible for one person to reach all of the teachers in a year, there were many who never had benefit of her counsel. For her visit to coincide with any crisis would be even more to chance. This was, at best, a very hit-and-miss gunshot approach which could not have been of much help to teachers or to the central administration. Stortz and Wilson assessed that, in practical terms, her appointment was an inadequate response to the seriousness of the teachers' plight. No evidence of improvement exists from Bowron's efforts, and Stortz and Wilson therefore concluded that the Department administrators and inspectors remained either apathetic about or helpless to ameliorate the problems in remote one-room schools.. In reality, there never was any expectation that real change would be brought about by her work. Wilson concluded that Bowron "had little long-term effect on the state of rural schooling in the province" and that she and Education Minister Hinchliffe understood her function as "pastoral, not reformist in nature."<sup>45</sup> Because hers was a political appointment, Willis had to accept that her job and function were that of a supernumerary.

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview May 24, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Dr. Bernard Gillie. For a detailed description of Lottie Bowron's career, see J. Donald Wilson, "'I am here to help if you need me': British Columbia's Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, 1928-1934," Journal of Canadian Studies 25, 2 (Summer 1990): 94 - 118.

<sup>45</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "'I am here to help if you need me': British Columbia's Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, 1928-1934," p. 112. Also see Thomas Fleming, et al., "Lottie Bowron Within Organizational Realities and Bases of Power: British Columbia 1928-1934," Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations, 5, 2 (1986): 7-31.

Willis focussed on reports from his men in the field and would not necessarily have received or seen Bowron's reports. The sheer number of school districts would have overwhelmed even the most dedicated report reader. Stortz pointed out that Department officials depended almost exclusively on inspectors' reports to become informed. These were unlikely sources of information about local problems. Inspectors had personal interest in presenting their districts in a positive light:

A positive report of one's own district meant that good work was being done, a fine reference to have when a position opened up in the Department administration, a normal school, or a less remote inspectorate.

and

The administrators' information about isolated communities came from the inspectors, the majority of whom spent only a few hours in each school, largely for the purpose of administering the Department's new intelligence and achievement tests.<sup>46</sup>

When Bowron returned to Victoria on March 9, 1934 from one of her excursions to visit teachers, she found waiting a letter from Education Minister Weir informing her that her job was being terminated. There had been no warning. Immediately, she sought an explanation and met the next day with Superintendent Willis. The only comfort he could offer was to inform her that he was aware the decision to retire the position had been made by cabinet. Bowron recorded in her diary that Willis had "no complaint of any sort against my work."<sup>47</sup> Her departure had been handled as one would expect any patronage appointment of a previous government. The Liberals had finally gotten around to undoing hers, likely for no other reason than they would no longer brook a political ally and former aide of Premier McBride. Although Willis had supported her appointment initially, after a

<sup>46</sup> Paul James Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), pp. 49-50.

<sup>47</sup> BCARS, Additional Manuscripts, 44, Bowron Daily Journal, March 9-10, 1934.

change of government from Conservative to Liberal, there was little he could do to block her firing. This was an instance where he had to maintain the detached stance of the impartial civil servant. The limits of the position of Deputy Minister were clear. Willis did not participate in partisan politics. For those who did, it was then, and continues to be, that those favoured hold their appointments or privileges "at pleasure."

### **COPING WITH PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION**

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the concepts of "Progressive education" enjoyed prominence in North America. The Progressives expounded to the public the concept of "efficiency" for the schools as an admirable and achievable goal. Stortz defined "Progressive education" as a two-pronged concept that conjoined images of "financial expediency" (whether schooling was being provided economically) and of "pupil academic success" (whether students passed the exams).<sup>48</sup> But, as Sutherland demonstrated, most schools were run by young, neophyte teachers whose training and life experience left them only marginally prepared to cope with the existing curriculum, let alone any of the new "child-centred" approaches being touted by educational theorists. Formalism, traditional learning based on rote memorization, the textbook as curriculum, and conformity prevailed.<sup>49</sup> Progressive notions of flexibility in learning rates and physical classroom arrangement, group activity and subject integration remained elusive ideals in most schools. Willis and his Department may have hoped for an advanced system, but they

---

<sup>48</sup> Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s" (M.A. thesis, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver From the 1920s to the 1960s." BC Studies 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986): 175-210.



must have suspected the limitations of the financial and human resources they were able to deploy.

In his first year as Education Minister, Hinchliffe published an open letter "To those parents who have boys and girls growing up in the outlying rural districts of British Columbia." His was a policy of inclusion, as he declared on behalf of the provincial government that "How to arrive at the goal of equal educational opportunity for all of the boys and girls of British Columbia is our present concern."<sup>50</sup> Although more money was being spent on education, it was never enough. After a decade in office, Willis could note that the education budget in 1929-30 had almost doubled to \$10 million (of which the government contribution was \$3.7 million) and the teaching ranks had swelled almost to 3,800 from 2,557 in 1919-20. The impact of the Great Depression would heighten concern about public expenditures of all kinds. Education -- ever the convenient target -- was in the cross hairs as enriched curricula and anything departing from "the basics" were disparaged as "frills."

By 1927-28, Willis wrote in his annual report that "the majority of the School Boards are doing everything possible to provide modern and adequate facilities for classroom service."<sup>51</sup> The next year, 1928-29, the Department announced a revision of the high school curriculum. This was an extension of the work already begun in previous years to enrich the elementary and junior high school programmes. In his report Willis declared that students were being overwhelmed by the number of subjects and were either leaving school early or having to repeat the grade. The Department announced the revision would be ready by Easter 1930, and then printed and distributed to all high schools.

---

<sup>50</sup> B.C. Teacher, 8, 5 (June 1929), p. 43.

<sup>51</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1927-28, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1928), p. V18.

Successive annual reports during the 1930s continued to implement the Putman-Weir survey recommendations. Overall, there was general satisfaction among the public that the school system was functioning as it should.<sup>52</sup> Whether or not teachers should encourage children's development was not the issue with Progressives. Harries regretted that:

this idea is fogged by dissertations on methods, on curricula selection, intelligence tests, achievement tests, curves of distribution, systems of finance, and the whole checkerboard of whims of would-be theorists, until the child's interests are quite secondary to the justification of someone's pet theory.<sup>53</sup>

In the midst of the Depression, British Columbia teachers still sought to improve schooling. By 1930, school teaching conditions differed little from those of 1920. Part of the cause could well have been that reports from inspectors were kept more positive than they should have been. There was an unfortunate duplicity, for it likely caused teachers in the field to endure hardships much longer than they would have been tolerated had the problems been appropriately flagged and addressed by Department officials. This type of report writing was motivated by inspectors' desire to be transferred out of difficult and desperate situations -- the very ones that their hapless teachers longed to escape! In line with this ambition, there was also concern that inspectors' colleagues at the normal school and in the Department not be offended or made to feel lacking. The Department had Teachers' Surveys of 1923 and 1928. They also had reports from Bowron as the Teachers' Welfare Officer. Yet, no indication of urgency on the part of the Department to make

---

<sup>52</sup> My own investigation of newspaper coverage of education in the late 1920s revealed little controversy. Jean Mann's research supports this, and she noted "Whatever criticisms the public voiced of the innovations occurring in education in the late twenties, they failed to reach the ear of the press. In fact, education did not appear to occasion much public comment during those years." *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>53</sup> S.O. Harries, "Has Progressive Education Failed?" B.C. Teacher 27, 4 (January 1948), p. 147.

changes was apparent. Realistically, what could be done? Although there was no such admission, the Department was helpless to assuage the basic discomforts of weather, geography, social isolation and poor living quarters. The formal response to assist teachers instead came more in attempts to improve their salaries and to protect them from being bullied by local trustees.

Former Inspector Graham recalled examples of very spare teaching conditions which continued to be tolerated even as late as 1940. On becoming Principal of the new Peace River High School in 1932, he discovered there was no jelly pad for duplicating handout material. They did have an abundance of chalk. He used to drive out to the rural schools to give chalk to the teachers who did not have any. Later, in 1940, as Inspector of Schools in Chilliwack, Stewart came across very large and poorly housed classes. He exclaimed, "I found a Grade One class in the Chilliwack East Elementary School in a semi-basement room with four bare bulbs as the only light. There were 52 students!"<sup>54</sup> Willis was not properly aware of the actual material and social circumstances surrounding teachers in rural areas.

Up until that time, decisions taken by the educational bureaucracy to change the curriculum often meant simply changing the text book. Even with official approval, exhortations from the Department and the normal schools concerning the introduction of Progressive, efficient or effective learning styles still relied upon individual teachers to make change happen. For inexperienced teachers to whom the curriculum *was* the textbook, introduction of innovative teaching techniques or the new activity methods depended upon how much imagination or enthusiasm teachers could muster. Yet, it was

---

<sup>54</sup> Interview July 31, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham in New Westminster.

the nature of Canadian teachers to be generally "conservative and cautious in adopting new ideas."<sup>55</sup>

Recommendations of the Putman-Weir report took a long time to realize, held back by resistance to change from the teachers, from inside the Department, and sometimes from the public. The intent to "make haste slowly" became the watchwords of cautious educationists. While Willis favoured and supported Progressive education, he was, at the same time, someone who approved of gradual change.

As the province's fortunes dwindled with the onset of the Depression, the years ahead became difficult ones. Willis and his Ministers were put on the defensive about educational expenditures.

---

<sup>55</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A Brief History of Canadian Education (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited, 1968), p. 136.

## Chapter 5

### Struggling Schools: The Depression Years, 1930 - 1938

*The way out of the Depression does not lie in scuttling youth by cutting down educational expenditures.<sup>1</sup>*

#### BACKGROUND TO THE DEPRESSION

The Great Depression, together with changes of provincial government, had substantial effects on British Columbia's education system. The economic crises the Depression precipitated affected directly the province's revenues and, in turn, the budgets and plans of the Education Department. From 1930 on, Willis faced fiscal restraint as the school population steadily grew. Support for education from the provincial government faltered and teachers came under attack in the 1930s. Teachers' salaries became just one more possible source of savings as governments sought to reduce spending. Concern for provincial expenditures overall, including the cost of education, set in motion a chain of events which resulted in appointment of the Kidd Committee and, ultimately, the defeat of the Tolmie government in 1933.

The province's roller-coaster economy between 1918 and 1939 has been described by Barman in Dickensian terms as "The Best and Worst of Times,"<sup>2</sup> representing the good life interrupted by the Depression years. In the 1920s, peace became equated with

---

<sup>1</sup> The Vancouver Province, 3 April 1934, p. 1. Excerpt from Education Minister George Moir Weir's remarks to the annual B.C.T.F. convention.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.) This description is used as the title for Chapter 11 covering the 1920s and the Depression years.

prosperity, but by the end of the 1930s, relief from the Depression came with the return to a war economy.

Immediately following the First World War, the population of British Columbia, along with the rest of Canada, was optimistic for the future. To judge by the language and arguments of politicians and journalists, people expected better opportunities once the federal government and businesses nationwide were relieved of wartime commitments and restrictions. The country's economic base was changed by the war, as industrialization opened the way for secondary industries, and as export markets expanded for forestry and mining industry products. The federal government undertook to fund technical education to match Canada's workforce skills with industry needs. However, that programme became a victim of cutbacks when the federal government stopped funding technical education in the province in March 1929. When Willis announced the change, he was asked whether the provincial government was willing to take over funding. He responded that the question "was a matter of policy on which he was not prepared to speak."<sup>3</sup> The statement came within a month of the federal government's termination of the programme, and it is likely that negotiations were still underway. Since British Columbia's government had yet to learn about the funding decision, Willis rightly demurred when asked about alternative funding.

The good times of the 1920s were celebrated in the province's rejection of prohibition, and the opportunity was taken up by the provincial government which maintained a monopoly on the sale of alcohol.<sup>4</sup> By 1924, liquor stores opened around the

<sup>3</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 20 February 1929, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Robin, The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province 1871-1933 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972), p. 181. Robin describes the October 20, 1920 prohibition referendum in which Attorney-General J. Wallace deBeque Farris had voters choose between complete prohibition or sale by government control.

province, popularly dubbed for the premier as "John Oliver's drug stores."<sup>5</sup> Premier Oliver presided over stable times. The government even decreased taxes while spending more on social welfare and on building the provincial road system. No doubt some of the proceeds went to public education.

In 1925, Putman and Weir contemplated suggestions for restructuring educational finance. They proposed that the prevailing school tax on property be reduced and an income tax instituted. They also suggested that an equalization fund be established to assist districts with low tax bases. Both these suggestions would be included in King's 1935 report. King's and Putman-Weir's approaches differed, however, in two other aspects. Putman and Weir proposed that the provincial government not assume the full cost of education and upheld the authority of school boards regarding determination of expenditures for schools. King took the opposite tack. He proposed that schools be financed by the central government and that school boards then be eliminated once education was funded from Victoria. There is no record of public comment from Willis on this subject. However, he did approve of, and operated with, strong central control. This was particularly apparent in his willingness to appoint official trustees to replace boards as he deemed necessary.

The 1920s boom had been felt in all sectors of the resource-based economy. Because manufacturing and retail trades had grown, the tax base was dramatically increased. There was now less reliance on the province's primary industries. When the Premier campaigned for re-election, he used this as proof of his ability to manage the provincial economy. During the campaign, "Oliver repeated that the major sources of government revenue shifted under his regime from the resources sales to direct taxes."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> S.W. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers: An Informational History of British Columbia (Sidney: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969), p. 193.

This claim was important in his campaign to win the December 1, 1920 election. Government revenue in 1920 was double the figure four years earlier. Children attended school with increasing regularity by the 1920s, no longer bound by the turn-of-the-century necessity "to perform household tasks, farm chores, or work for pay to assist the family economy."<sup>7</sup> The changing economy was beginning to have a direct impact on education. and public expectations of improvement led to demands for school reform. Premier Oliver had appointed Putman and Weir to conduct an educational survey, thereby subscribing to the ambitious goals of the educational reformers and the public. An optimistic populace pinned hopes for future prosperity and better opportunities for their children on planned changes to school programmes. Oliver also needed to show leadership and garner public support for the Liberal party in the 1924 election. A demonstration of concern for public schooling would help align political support which was badly needed since the temperance forces had gathered behind the Conservatives.

Political leadership changed twice in quick succession. After learning from the Mayo Clinic that he was dying of cancer, Oliver passed the workload to his Education Minister, John Duncan MacLean, naming him Premier-designate. Oliver remained Premier in name, but relinquished virtually all his duties to MacLean. He died August 17, 1927 and MacLean became Premier for just one year, suffering both personal and party defeat in 1929. Fortune had run out for the Liberal party, in office for twelve years.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Barman, The West Beyond the West, p. 227. Barman observes that this was particularly true in urban centres, but was not necessarily the case in some remote regions of the province.

<sup>8</sup> Robin, The Rush for Spoils, p. 241. Robin contends that the Conservatives won "virtually by default." The Liberals lost despite attracting 45% of the ballots cast. The distribution of votes was not in the Liberals' favour, thereby allowing the Conservatives a win by dint of riding arrangement.



By the end of the 1920s, the "worst of times" had arrived. Canada's westernmost province was hard hit, suffering a staggering Depression-era unemployment rate of 27.5%, involving 140,000 individuals in a total population of a half million people.<sup>9</sup> In such a flattened economy, jobs were practically non-existent and British Columbia's government revenue -- normally comprised of taxes and modest federal government transfers -- was constrained by the inability of corporations and individual landowners to remit taxes due. When the provincial Conservative party wrested power from the Liberals in 1928, it promised to run the province like a business, a workable plan in buoyant times. The Depression that followed on the heels of the 1929 stock market crash meant any semblance of economic policy was difficult to apply in a much altered, non-functioning economy. Recognition by the Department of Education that education had such a role to play in economic recovery came in official pronouncements by Ministers and Superintendent Willis and through initiatives to improve educational offerings in the hinterland through such means as correspondence courses.

### **The Kidd Report**

As Premier, Simon Fraser Tolmie established work camps with the double-edged purpose of providing employment and removing men from cities and the influence of socialist agitators. It was not much of a response, and the public began to sense the government's inertia. In the view of one provincial historian, "Fundamentally, Tolmie was completely out of his depth in the crisis that he had to face."<sup>10</sup> Eventually, the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 235. Data were extracted from the 1931 Census of Canada. Robin explained the high unemployment rate occurred as British Columbia became a "magnate for the unemployed of other provinces" and thus endured the highest unemployment rate in the country.

<sup>10</sup> Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers, p. 213.

Vancouver business community stepped in to offer leadership and assistance with a group led by H.R. MacMillan, a forestry industry leader and Vice-President of the Vancouver Board of Trade.

Tolmie received ill-fated advice from the power brokers of the province:

The hammer that would smash his administration appeared one morning on the steps of the legislative building. A deputation from twenty-two organizations had come to ask the premier to appoint a committee to investigate the whole field of government finances. Tolmie had to listen, for they represented the Vancouver Board of Trade, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Merchants' Association, five Vancouver service clubs -- in short, most of the money in the province.<sup>11</sup>

The group convinced Premier Tolmie to allow them authority to investigate and propose solutions to the problems of provincial finance. The promise of political support was likely an influencing factor. MacMillan wrote to the Premier that the "business community is ready to give their full support to the man who shows the courage to make prompt drastic reductions in public expenditure."<sup>12</sup> Since one of the largest financial expenditures was on Education, it was a department bound to come under their scrutiny. Tolmie allowed them to proceed. A democratically elected government surrendered its direction, and ultimately its fate, to a five-man committee.

In mid-April 1932, George Kidd, former B.C. Electric president, was appointed head of the committee,<sup>13</sup> and the government promised to publish the report within six

---

<sup>11</sup> Roger Keene and David C. Humphreys, Conversations With W.A.C. Bennett (Toronto: Methuen, 1980), p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from the Tolmie Papers, Box 7, File 12, Special Collections, U.B.C. November 25th, 1931; cited in David C. Jones and Timothy A. Dunn, "'All of Us Common People' and Education in the Depression," Canadian Journal of Education, 5, 4 (1980): 42.

<sup>13</sup> The Committee was comprised of George Kidd, W.L. Mackenzie, Austin Taylor, A.H. Douglas and R.W. Mayhew -- all prominent businessmen. They were chosen by Premier Tolmie after requesting the deputation offer him a list of eight nominees.

weeks of its completion, although it gave no hint whether it would accept or act upon any of its recommendations. Practical support for the committee's work came in the form of seconded government employees and open access to all government departments and their records.

The Kidd Committee presented its report to the government on July 12, 1932. The content of its recommendations reputedly shocked Premier Tolmie. Cognizant of how politically damaging the report could be, he tried to suppress its publication and even refused the Leader of the Opposition any knowledge of the contents.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the Victoria Daily Times obtained a copy and printed the entire report in its August 30, 1932 edition. The report's tersely-written 52 pages and three pages of summary recommendations laid out a plan of budget-slashing which affected all government services and offended most people. The recommendations affecting education were:

limitation of free schooling to children under fourteen, the imposition of fees covering 50% of educational costs of school children from fourteen to sixteen and 100% of the cost of children over sixteen, the raising of Normal School fees to cover the whole cost, withholding of the University grant of \$250,000, abolition of school boards, the cutting of teachers' salaries by 25% in aggregate<sup>15</sup>

Education appeared to bear the brunt of the committee's attack. No level of the system went unscathed. The recommendations reflected the values of well-off members of society who would not have been personally affected in their lives or business affairs.

As one might expect from a seasoned bureaucrat, Willis refrained from making public his own reaction to the committee's recommendations. He would no doubt have

---

<sup>14</sup> Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Robin, The Rush for Spoils, p. 240.

been as horrified as the government members and shared Premier Tolmie's discomfort. Because it was professional and appropriate to do so, and actually risky to do otherwise, Willis maintained a position of neutrality throughout the controversy. Instead, he allowed the teaching profession to speak through the B.C.T.F. what most likely reflected his own sentiments.

The B.C.T.F. responded with a strong editorial denouncing the elitist and reactionary attitudes behind the recommendations. Twenty-six pages of the October 1932 edition of the B.C. Teacher were given over to editorial comment, a report by a B.C.T.F. Committee paper analyzing the report, a reprint of the Kidd Report paragraphs 150 to 176 concerning education, a sampling of government comment on half the report's paragraphs on education, and an economic analysis of the report's implications by Henry F. Angus, Head, Department of Economics at U.B.C. Angus had written a popular manual of civic education for public secondary schools, Citizenship in British Columbia, in the 1920s, so it was not unexpected that he would defend the schools against the Kidd Committee. His analysis strongly argued that the report was biased against universal, free education.<sup>16</sup> The B.C.T.F. Committee also pointed out that the Kidd Report authors were essentially self-appointed and represented the interests of the privileged members of the business community.<sup>17</sup> The B.C.T.F. response upheld the importance of education as a right and as the means of creating good citizens, and as the way of forming leaders to develop the province's natural resources.

---

<sup>16</sup> The manual was published in 1926 by the C.F. Banfield Press in Victoria.

<sup>17</sup> Robin, The Rush for Spoils, p. 240. Robin discussed the committee's formation in his chapter "Business Government: 1929-1933." The Vancouver businessmen who suggested the study provided the government with a list of eight names, of which five were to be chosen to form the committee. Claiming no formal political allegiance, the Kidd Committee's pronouncements and language of the report declared to both Government and Opposition parties that they would put their political support behind the party which accepted their recommendations. Refer to pages 239 - 243.

Angus decried the report's recommendations as propaganda, not advice from experts. His objections to the report were sixfold: (1) it was unfair to the government; (2) it made no estimate of the province's taxable capacity and thereby dismissed the possibility of increasing taxation; (3) it contained misleading statements on the cost of education; (4) it used financial reasons to advance the committee's notion of acceptable social policy; (5) it gave too little consideration to moral considerations (e.g. "Can closing the University be considered without considering the vested interests which have arisen, the houses built at the site, the apartment houses, the commercial development of West Point Grey?"; and (6) it neglected the opportunity to appeal to moral sentiments (social conscience) in the broader community.<sup>18</sup> Although no record of his reaction exists, Willis must have been impressed by the fighting stance taken by his former U.B.C. colleague.

There were obviously other, less Draconian ways to solve the province's financial problems. Angus had faith in the public's will to help the cause and believed that British Columbians would acquiesce to sacrifices if they perceived the purpose as worthwhile. Believing that, he offered his opinion of the most prudent course for the government to follow in clearing the deficit: increase income taxes. As a leading economist, he considered this to be the only means to accomplish the aim of alleviating the province's dismal financial position. He faulted the report's authors for lack of vision, declaring "The Kidd Report is at best one-eyed. As men and as citizens we need the other eye as well -- that of the economist. We need the advantages of bifocal vision."<sup>19</sup>

The Report's recommendations were also soundly and vociferously denounced by U.B.C. Education professor George Weir. He lashed out at the report's callousness,

<sup>18</sup> B.C. Teacher, 12, 2 (October 1932), pp. 20-24.

<sup>19</sup> Henry F. Angus, "The Economics of the Kidd Report." B.C. Teacher 12, 2, (October 1932): pp. 20-26.

claiming that it "supported the revival of the Red River Ox Cart era of public education."<sup>20</sup> Public support for Weir's sentiments translated into strong political encouragement to run for public office. Weir headed the poll in his riding in the 1933 provincial general election, becoming the Liberal M.L.A. for Vancouver-Point Grey.<sup>21</sup> This was a near-perfect riding for a candidate like Weir. He had lived there for ten years and was a professional in a largely professional neighbourhood.

The Kidd Report had come under strong attack also by Duff Pattullo while Leader of the Official Opposition. Pattullo declared that, since Tolmie had not thrown out the report entirely, he had thereby betrayed the public trust. The November 2, 1933 election unseated Tolmie in his Saanich riding and brought back the Liberals under Pattullo. Tolmie's Conservatives suffered defeat because they were bankrupt both in ideas and in public confidence.

British Columbians, like most North Americans, wanted a change in political leadership, something which was anticipated continent-wide for sitting governments. America had the beginnings of a "New Deal" under Roosevelt and in Canada the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was newly-organized, gaining ground, and poised to offer voters a socialist option. Pattullo's Liberals used the campaign slogan "work and wages" in their appeal for electoral support. It paid off when the Liberals captured 42% of the popular vote, while the C.C.F. pulled a strong 32%. The change of government was

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>21</sup> Weir was re-elected in 1945, and was named Minister of Education in the Johnson government. He served until failing health caused him to retire in 1947.

about to have a direct effect on Willis' career. He would certainly have anticipated Pattullo's choice for Education Minister.<sup>22</sup>

### **WEIR BECOMES MINISTER: DEPUTY'S ROLE DECLINES**

Forming the government with 34 of the 47 seats, Pattullo appointed G.M. Weir as Provincial Secretary and Minister of Education and John Hart as Minister of Finance.<sup>23</sup> Enticing Hart back into public service after his retirement from politics in 1924 was recognized as a mark of Pattullo's influence and persuasiveness. The province's declining fortunes meant it was not an easy job being Finance Minister. The Premier and Hart discovered the province was almost bankrupt. Pattullo knew his personal political fortunes would be tied to the strength of the provincial economy.<sup>24</sup>

In provincial governments Canada-wide, the man appointed Education Minister was not necessarily the one most knowledgeable about the issues. The true expert was more likely to be the Deputy responsible for administration. It was he, with relative security of tenure, who in large measure determined departmental policy.<sup>25</sup> For fourteen years Willis held sway with considerable latitude while John Duncan MacLean (1916-1928) and Joshua Hinchliffe (1928-1933) served their terms as Minister. MacLean divided his attention between Education and other cabinet appointments he held which were, variously, Minister

---

<sup>22</sup> For a complete and interesting account of Pattullo's political career, see the biography by Robin Fisher, Duff Pattullo of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.)

<sup>23</sup> John Neil Sutherland, "T.D. Pattullo as a Party Leader" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960), pp. 162-163.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Hilda Neatby, So Little For the Mind (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1953), p. 20.

of Railways, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Finance. MacLean focussed on establishing technical schools and worked to help finance and establish the University of British Columbia on its Point Grey site. Hinchliffe had a clerical background.<sup>26</sup> He therefore relied on Willis as the expert in educational matters. Teachers took note of the legislation Hinchliffe sponsored making Bible reading compulsory in schools. He did this during a time when there was widespread public rejection of church dominance in education. Willis made no public comment on this, yet as a religious man, he would see it as an acceptable school exercise. Hinchliffe and Willis had a close working relationship. He would have deferred to Willis' expertise in the educational realm. That role reversed when Weir became Minister.

A less experienced politician would have deferred to Willis' political expertise and knowledge of the system. However, with Weir's appointment as Education Minister in 1933, Willis experienced a lessening of authority. Willis recognized Weir as a strong minister, and so had the good political sense to keep more in the background throughout the Weir ministry, than he had previously done. Bernard Gillie, former B.C.T.F. President and first Principal of the S.J. Willis School in Victoria, believed there was a decline in Willis' authority once Weir became Minister. He referred to it as "the beginning of the decline of the Willis mystique."<sup>27</sup> Weir had been principal of the normal school in Saskatchewan, Head of Education at U.B.C., and co-author of the Putman-Weir Report.<sup>28</sup> For the first time, Willis was in a position of support to a Minister whose stature in educational circles exceeded his, and, for that matter, any of the Ministers who preceded Weir.

---

<sup>26</sup> Hinchliffe was a retired Canon in the Anglican Church when he entered politics.

<sup>27</sup> Interview May 24, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Bernard Gillie.

<sup>28</sup> A province-wide study commissioned by the Department of Education and conducted over a nine-month period from the fall of 1924 until presented May 30th, 1925.



Authority involves the perception of power as much as the actual right to exercise it. The stature Willis enjoyed in the Department accorded him a sphere of personal influence within and outside education circles. He was also entitled to authority by virtue of his expertise. This perception of Willis' power as Deputy changed once his authority was eclipsed by that of Weir.

There were other reasons Willis experienced a lessening of authority. At first, this was because of Weir's strong reputation and background as an educationist.<sup>29</sup> Willis' role as advice-giver diminished, and instead he began to receive direction from the Minister about work to be done and sometimes even how to go about it. The second, later reason Willis' authority diminished was Weir's decision to appoint H.B. King as "Chief Inspector of Schools" effective September 19, 1939.

Weir initially brought King to Victoria in 1934 to place him in charge of the extensive curriculum revision planned for the 1930s. Once that work was completed and King had written a 230-page report on School Finance in British Columbia, the "King Report" of 1935, Weir then appointed him Chief Inspector of Schools. A recommendation of the Putman-Weir Report, the position was created as an additional administrative level over the two inspectors of high schools and the twenty inspectors of elementary and superior schools existing in 1937-38. Willis acknowledged the new appointment with a one-sentence mention at the end of his 1938-39 Annual Report:

---

<sup>29</sup> B.C. Teacher 3, 10 (June 1924), p. 230. The publication listed this description of Weir's background: an honour graduate in arts, McGill University; a master of arts, University of Saskatchewan; doctor of pedagogy, with honors, Queen's University; post-graduate courses at Queen's and Chicago universities; completed the bar examination of the Law Society of Saskatchewan; teacher; provincial inspector; historical research scholar at the Dominion Archives; Vice-Principal and Principal of the Saskatchewan normal school and Professor of Education, University of British Columbia.

On September 19th, 1939, H.B. King, M.A., Ph.D., who has been acting in the capacity of Technical Adviser, was appointed Chief Inspector of Schools.<sup>30</sup>

Willis could not have been happy. This appointment effectively diminished his responsibilities. Within the Department, people were aware the two men did not have a collegial relationship. King's appointment would have been disappointing to Willis if for no other reason than it accelerated his decline in stature.<sup>31</sup> Former B.C.T.F. President Bernard Gillie remembered he had the impression that Willis gave up after King's appointment. "If you wanted to know anything in education, you didn't go to Willis, you went to King. I know there was feeling about that."<sup>32</sup> Former Inspector Stewart Graham recalled that Weir was a great fan of H.B. King and also that it was well known, and a matter of public record, that Weir appointed him at a salary of only \$100.00 less than Willis. That was significant because the message was that King was just as important. Graham stated, "That very definitely did make Willis uncomfortable."<sup>33</sup>

The matter of curriculum revision had been one to which Willis devoted his attention from the beginning. When Weir brought King in to organize and co-ordinate the work of the Curriculum Revision Committee, Willis was relieved of that responsibility. In 1939, King garnered more of what had been Willis' task by becoming responsible for supervision and inspection of schools. The superintendency had become too big for one

---

<sup>30</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1938-39 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1939), p. H35.

<sup>31</sup> In the Superintendent's Annual Report for 1938-39, Willis gave King's appointment a mere one sentence mention at the end of his report. See British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1938-39 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1939), p. H35.

<sup>32</sup> Interview May 24, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Bernard Gillie.

<sup>33</sup> Interview July 31, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham (New Westminster, B.C.).

person and the responsibility had to be shared, but it would have been difficult to hand over one of the reins. While the Central Committee reported to the Minister through Willis, King's involvement effectively relegated Willis to the sidelines on the actual work of curriculum review.

Weir had been elected M.L.A. in 1933 for Vancouver-Point Grey and was appointed Education Minister in the new Pattullo government. Weir was a strong personality who brought a substantial personal agenda to the position as Minister. Specifically, he wanted administrators in the field, as in the Department, to promote the principle of the four-year high school; the 6-3-3 plan wherever possible; professional development of the teaching ranks; and the use of intelligence tests and standardized achievement tests. He was now in a position of power to ensure that Progressive education policies would be put in place, as originally urged in the Putman-Weir report, and had a Deputy in Willis who was an advocate of such innovations.<sup>34</sup>

Weir's policy statement printed in the B.C. Teacher was set out in the form of a letter to Willis, dated September 13, 1935, directing him to inform every official in the system. Although Willis was known for his well-written and succinct communications, the Minister provided the instruction: "Probably the simplest way of conveying these policies to the officials concerned is to send this communication to them verbatim."<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Tests were important to assess students and stream or steer them into appropriate courses of study according to individual aptitude. No direct comment concerning Willis' opinions on intelligence or standardized achievement tests was found in the course of research for this dissertation.

<sup>35</sup> Reprinted with the Minister's permission in the B.C. Teacher 15, 6 (February 1936): 18-19.

## The King Report

All through the 1930s the provincial government grappled with finance. A Royal Commission was appointed May 20, 1933, under an Order-in-Council, to investigate the financial and administrative conditions of the various municipalities throughout British Columbia. The Vancouver School Board presented a brief September 27, 1933. They proposed that "the Provincial Government should make possible a stable supply of sufficient funds for the adequate support of the educational programme required by the government." In their summary, the board alluded to social costs if education were short-changed. "Money saved through crippling education will possibly result in enlarging other State institutions and expenditures."<sup>36</sup>

Later correspondence from the Department to the Vancouver School Board in 1934 indicated that the government was in no hurry to act. Education Minister Weir advised the board that although educational finance was to be reconstructed, it was a project for the future:

This Government has not had an opportunity to recast the financial provisions of the present Schools Act. Any hasty legislation brought down during the present Session would tend to throw our whole School System into confusion. It is obvious that inequalities and disparities do exist in the administration of the present Act, and the object of the amendments brought down in this Session of the House is primarily to alleviate, not to cure, these disparities.

and

I may state that I am looking forward to considerable assistance from your School Board when the problem of revising the financial structure of our Educational System is under review.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Vancouver City Archives, 56-F-3, File 5.

<sup>37</sup> George M. Weir to H. F. Hines, Secretary, Board of School Trustees. March 19, 1934, Vancouver; Vancouver City Archives, 58-A-1, File 1. Letter dated March 19, 1934.

As a matter of management style, Willis believed in short-circuiting problems in school districts by suspending the locally-elected trustees and replacing them with official trustees. By the standards of the late twentieth century, this frank and forceful state action appears both high-handed and arbitrary. However, Willis wanted school matters handled "properly" and in an "orderly" fashion. If problems arose, as in the Peace River District in the 1930s, he felt justified in replacing trustees with an official who could administer efficiently. He was justified in doing so whenever he had evidence that the trustees were (by dint of not paying school taxes) not legally qualified, unfit from an educational standpoint, lacked familiarity with the Schools Act, or were abusing the teacher. The appointment of an "official trustee" was not a common practice, but was an option available to Willis if other solutions were unworkable or not forthcoming.<sup>38</sup>

Acting on one of the recommendations of the 1925 Putman-Weir Report, and out of financial urgency, the Education Department announced in 1933 its intention to experiment with creation of larger administrative units. The first experiment occurred in 1933 in the Peace River region. There, the pockets of students scattered over seventeen schools were organized under an Official Trustee, William A. Plenderleith. His appointment caused controversy when local people objected to his youth and "radical changes."<sup>39</sup>

This experiment resulted in economies of scale in areas such as purchase of supplies and improved the range of educational offerings within the districts. The scheme was then expanded to the entire region in 1934 by creating four large units, each with six to fourteen of the original small school districts. Inspector Plenderleith was assigned as Inspector of

---

<sup>38</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 2, File 2. Memorandum to Premier Pattullo from Superintendent Willis December 13, 1934.

<sup>39</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 2, File 2. Letter to Premier Pattullo from the Chairman and Secretary of the Rolla, B.C. school district, December 1, 1934.

the Peace River District as of May 1, 1934, and within a year was named Inspector and Official Trustee. By 1935, he oversaw the amalgamation of the four units into one school district for the entire Peace River region. The advantages expected were "to remove anomalies in the rate of school taxation and to encourage the adoption of a fair schedule of salaries for teachers throughout the district, and generally to administer the schools with even greater efficiency than in the past."<sup>40</sup> Willis was highly supportive of this action and his appointed official trustee, and indicated so in his memorandum. The Peace River experiment is described more fully later in this chapter.

Another amalgamation in 1935 combined the Matsqui, Sumas and Abbotsford areas. The Department planned to amalgamate the province's 806 existing school districts and, where possible, to consolidate schools. In June 1934, the government called for a formal study of the amalgamation plan. H. B. King, then a Vancouver Junior High School Principal, was chosen to act as technical advisor and would become author of the report.<sup>41</sup> The front-page newspaper coverage played up the importance of the study and its eight-point mandate. King invited the public to submit "written memoranda" on:

1. The distribution of the burden of school finance.
2. The consideration of a new source of revenue.
3. The problem of centralization or decentralization of financial control.
4. The size of administrative units.
5. The consideration of special cases where there are municipal and extra-municipal areas.
6. The question of school fees.
7. The cost of text books.
8. The possibilities of saving without loss of efficiency.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 2, File 2. Memo to Premier Pattullo from Superintendent Willis December 13, 1934.

<sup>41</sup> H.B. King, School Finance in British Columbia (Victoria: The King's Printer, 1935).

<sup>42</sup> Victoria Times, 11 July 1934:1.

Willis happened to keep a small notebook which he carried as an *aide-memoire*. The notations concern personnel and supply problems in schools and reminders to address any problems he encountered. At the back are typewritten pages which he had organized into topic headings. These were his speech notes.<sup>43</sup> Pages were devoted to the school finance survey, beginning with a quick outline of school finance from 1872. Willis explained that under the existing system property tax was the basis for school funding in each district. By the mid-thirties, people were land-rich but cash-poor. Willis told his audiences:

the amount of property in one's possession is no longer a safe gauge of a person's ability to pay. It is for this reason that a survey of school finance is now being held in the Province. There is perhaps no Province or country where this question of school finance is not engaging serious attention. All bodies in the Province who are interested in the subject have already submitted suggestions which are being studied by a committee of experts and it is hoped that as a result some more equitable and scientific formula may be evolved for settling this troublesome question for some time to come.<sup>44</sup>

Like most government-commissioned studies, the King Commission was meant to produce a report the government could uphold and approve. The commission had only two official members, Minister of Education George Weir and Minister of Finance John Hart. As technical advisor, King was to be assisted by an unwieldy 30-member committee headed by the B.C.T.F.'s General Secretary, Harry Charlesworth. Membership on the sub-committee was drawn from organizations concerned with education. The B.C.T.F. leadership was logical since it was a major lobbyist in the reorganization of education, which directly affected employment of the membership. This was also an era before the

---

<sup>43</sup> One section of these notes was about the establishment of accredited high schools. It was delivered *verbatim* as a speech to the Sixteenth National Conference of Canadian Universities. A copy is filed in the B.C.T.F. Records Department.

<sup>44</sup> BCARS, GR 139, File 76-G-69 Vol. 4. Document is a small-format notebook, dated 1934.

association's relationship with the government became adversarial. Records from meetings over these years indicate the relationship between Charlesworth and Willis was cordial.

The King Commission's structure had the outward appearance of being democratic. The findings of the thirty-person committee were in turn edited and compiled by a five-member revision committee. The final report was, in fact, written entirely by H.B. King and the revision committee's report was reduced to its summary pages only. King relegated their work to the last 14 pages of his report's appendix. King had effectively co-opted production of the report, and it is not likely that Willis had any direct influence on its contents, considering that their relationship was strained. Willis would have recognized the strong connection between King and Minister Weir, and thereby went along with the way the report was being handled.

Since the objective of the King Report was to investigate the finance requirements of the province's education system and to recommend means to fund it, the resulting recommendations predictably sought to eliminate some costs and to alter the tax structure. The recommendations were crafted to achieve a cost-contained system by reorganizing and consolidating school districts, having government support education through general revenues instead of personal property tax, and eliminating rural school boards in favour of a centralized system of school administration. Plenderleith's success in the Peace River experiment had become a model for reasonable school finance.

Although Willis anticipated an equitable solution, recommendations on rural school finance were not. Rural schools were singled out to be deprived of their hard-won special considerations. Their school boards were to be eliminated first. King recommended that the grants to supplement teachers' salaries, provide lunch, equipment and even desks for rural schools also be discontinued. To King's thinking, he was being "equitable" by



recommending spending cuts in all areas. He proposed raising the mill rate for rural taxes to cover these costs.

King's thirteen major recommendations included two that attracted universal criticism: to impose an additional 2% income tax, and to abolish rural school boards. The King Report was decried as undemocratic for its suggestion that local control of schools be sacrificed for some bureaucratic notion of "efficiency" -- that central control would provide better organized and more economic management. As enterprises whose prosperity depended on the fate of other businesses, Vancouver newspapers adopted and mirrored the business community's nervous reaction. One article declared that, if the proposed sales tax were adopted, it would discourage industrial development and even drive existing industries out of the province.<sup>45</sup>

Weir announced the government would not move to abolish boards. The government and H.B. King were not necessarily at odds about what should be done. The government wanted efficient administration, and King agreed with the goal. The problem arose because King sought to accomplish it without involving the school boards. This rendered the report politically unpopular and caused the government to refuse the King Report recommendations. In spite of this, the ground was laid for consolidation. The first experiments marked the way for acceptance of large school districts and, whenever expedient, management by official trustee.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> The Vancouver Province, 17 September 1937:7 and Jean Mann, "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?," in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980), p. 104.

<sup>46</sup> Denis Charles Smith, "A Study of the Origin and Development of Administrative Organization in the Education System of British Columbia" (Ed.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1952), p. 130. Smith acknowledges "owing to what was considered to be the drastic nature of such recommendations at that time, they were not

The Kidd and King recommendations and public reaction to them, influenced government decisions about how to proceed with managing education. Reaction to the studies became barometers of the public will. Ultimately, this public reaction affected Willis because it helped resolve for the politicians how schooling should be administered and financed. The government chose to ignore the King Report, turning instead to the more manageable topic of curriculum reform and the safer recommendations of the Putman-Weir Report.

Barman and Sutherland offer explanations why the Kidd and King inquiries failed, whereas the Putman-Weir (1925) and Cameron (1945) commissions were successful. Of the latter, they noted four factors significant to success: (1) economic and social conditions were conducive to change; (2) both the public and the government supported the commissions' establishments; (3) individuals in charge were credentialized with expert status; and (4) the consultation process ensured broadly based public input.<sup>47</sup> Although officials assisting in the King report were experts, the other three factors militated against the chances of government endorsement or public support.

Perhaps it was the last reason -- failure to engage the public -- which guaranteed more than any other contributing factor the failure of the Kidd and King reports. Certainly each one's outcome would have been dramatically different if the commissioners had given more credence to public sensibilities. Suggestions of cutbacks in a faceless bureaucracy may be politically defensible with the public, but budget-trimming in schooling, which directly affects children and people's hopes for the future, was almost impossible to then implemented, but nevertheless the Report provided a basis for the pattern of development which followed."

<sup>47</sup> Jean Barman and Neil Sutherland, "Royal Commission Retrospective," Policy Explorations, 3, 1 (Winter 1988): 15.

legitimate. Dismissal of the importance of education was tantamount to denial of the younger generation's future prospects and ambition. Jones and Dunn thought the Kidd Report failed "primarily because it threatened to extinguish the deeply ingrained popular belief that education was a right and that it opened the door to social and economic improvement."<sup>48</sup> For Willis and other educationists the failure of the two negative reports would be regarded as deserved. Once again, he was careful not to enter a political debate or offer public comment. It could not have been pleasant to witness his Department come under such an attack.

Although not formally adopted, the King Report's recommendation concerning the size of administrative units and its advice to continue consolidation was carried out. Writing the Superintendent's Report section of the 1936-37 Annual Report, Willis stated that the results of the Peace River District experiment from 1934 to 1936 "had proved so successful that it had attracted attention not only in other parts of the Province, but also in other Provinces of Canada."<sup>49</sup> Lack of official government endorsement did not prevent the B.C. Teacher from lauding the King Report as "a splendid handbook on administrative conditions and educational statistics."<sup>50</sup> The data were useful to the teaching profession and the B.C.T.F. had one of their own called upon to undertake the report.

---

<sup>48</sup> David C. Jones and Timothy A Dunn, "'All of Us Common People' and Education in the Depression," Canadian Journal of Education 5, 4 (1980): 41-56.

<sup>49</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1936-37 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1937), p. I 31.

<sup>50</sup> B.C. Teacher, 20, 10 (June 1936): 31.

## THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

Apart from the mechanics of educational finance, the issue that affected people directly was availability and quality of schooling for their children. At the same time the King Report was being commissioned, Willis was himself looking into cost savings the Department could realize. One area he chose to eliminate was intergrade exams. A short paper Willis wrote in 1934 detailed the change in policy from requiring exams for promotion from one grade to another to establishment of the recommendation system then in place.<sup>51</sup> The decision whether a student should proceed to high school fell to elementary principals. The safeguard was that all recommendations were then reviewed by the Inspector of Schools and the principal of the high school. Further, any student could choose to write the entrance exams if he or she did not receive permission to attend high school through recommendation. Willis agreed with high school principals, teachers, and the Department of Education that fewer students should be required to write final examinations:

Each year approximately 50 per cent of the candidates who write the Matriculation or the Normal Entrance examination are successful in passing the full examination at the first sitting. The subjecting of these candidates to the expense and the nervous strain involved seems to be quite unnecessary and altogether unjustifiable.<sup>52</sup>

Because so many teachers in smaller high schools had little or no experience, it was impossible to grant a blanket exemption from exams. Willis outlined the standards he would like to implement, together with the responsibilities of the inspectors and principals for maintaining standards. He was particularly concerned that high schools be of high

---

<sup>51</sup> BCARS, GR 0139. A compilation of policy statements which Willis carried and used in speaking.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

calibre to prepare students for further study. He held strong opinions about maintaining academic standards, as indicated in this excerpt from his speaking notes:

The high reputation for thoroughness of work done in our High Schools must be maintained and to this end the greatest precautions must be taken to prevent the insidious growth of a laissez-faire attitude on the part of staffs and students and the deluging of our University and Normal Schools with indifferent students altogether lacking in aptitude, training and scholarship and quite unfitted to derive any benefit from attendance at those institutions.<sup>53</sup>

Later that year, front page headlines<sup>54</sup> announced that intergrade final examinations had been eliminated and that promotions would thereafter be made on recommendation. Willis explained that these tests were being eliminated to save time and expense since few students wrote them. Final exams were being retained for Grade 12 for university and normal school entrance, and for senior matriculation. Willis would not have been able to eliminate the higher level examinations. These had to be retained for comparison purposes with other provinces and for entrance to the normal school and the university.

It is fair to say that Willis' wish to liberalize the examination system came from both empathy and a preoccupation with costs. He had humanitarian concern for the students -- that they not be subjected to unnecessary "nervous strain" once their ability had been proven during the grade year. His policy was also a vote of confidence in the judgment of high school principals. Willis upheld the importance of high school leaving examinations, particularly for ensuring students' readiness to undertake higher studies at a teachers' college or university. However, his was not an "open door" or universal access policy where desire to learn was all that mattered for admission to post-secondary study. He remained adamant that higher education be reserved for those with adequate aptitude

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> The Colonist, 12 January 1936:1.

and preparation. Assessments of pupil ability were made on the basis of standardized examinations and I.Q. and aptitude tests. Although Willis did not comment on the subject of these tests, he condoned their use. Weir certainly did, and valued them as fundamental to determining aptitude and ability.<sup>55</sup> The tests had their use, and for the Department represented a means of quantifying achievement.

The Depression years did not dampen public demand for equity in public education; academic credentials were still valued, and education continued to be equated with the acquisition of employment opportunities. Willis played a central role in the system-wide curriculum revision announced by Minister Weir in 1935. Weir organized subject committees which reported to separate school committees at the elementary, junior high and senior high school levels. They, in turn, reported to an overall Central Committee, which reported directly to Willis.<sup>56</sup> The purpose of the curriculum revision, as stated by Premier Pattullo in an address to the 1935 B.C.T.F. convention, was "to make it better adapted to the present day needs of British Columbia."<sup>57</sup>

Another of Willis' continuing interests was development of the teaching profession. Despite Depression conditions, teachers were equally interested in improving their professional status. The University of British Columbia had begun offering a full year's training for high school teaching in 1926-27, showing teachers' eagerness to upgrade their skills. In the 1928-29 Annual Report, Willis noted the improved standing of student teachers:

---

<sup>55</sup> Jean Mann, "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?," in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980), p. 98.

<sup>56</sup> B.C. Teacher, 14, 8, (April 1935): 20-23.

<sup>57</sup> B.C. Teacher, 14, 10, (June 1935): 4-12.

It is interesting to note the gradual strengthening of the academic qualifications of teachers-in-training at the Normal Schools. Over 54 per cent of those in attendance at Victoria last year had considerably more than the minimum requirements for admission.<sup>58</sup>

In writing about the province's high schools in 1934, Willis noted with some satisfaction that the trend was continuing:

During the past few years the teachers on the High School staffs have been improving their academic qualifications and are thoroughly conversant with all modern trends in Education.<sup>59</sup>

On other occasions Willis was humanitarian in his treatment of people in poverty. His personal notebook contains reminders about people to be given cleaning or odd jobs at schools to alleviate hardship.<sup>60</sup> Willis was open to such requests, mindful that it was an indirect way to help their children continue going to school. In the Depression, children from poor families were even less likely to attend high school than in the previous decade. At a special meeting in the Princeton School District in 1934, the Board asked the provincial government to grant extra relief work to indigent parents so they might then afford to purchase school books for their children. It was noted that this type of arrangement already had been made so people could purchase hunting licenses and ammunition. The association wrote, "The opinion of the meeting was that education is more necessary and that, therefore, extra work should be supplied to those needing it, to provide the necessary books. This would probably affect 25 families. Some would require maybe 1 day or 2 days extra."<sup>61</sup> Willis passed the letter to his Minister, George M. Weir,

<sup>58</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1928-29 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1929), p. R11.

<sup>59</sup> BCARS, GR 0139.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 2 File 2. The letter to Willis was written September 20, 1934.

who in turn sent it to Premier Pattullo with the comment, "If these families are willing to work in order to earn sufficient money for the purchase of school books, they at least are actuated by the elements of good citizenship, and I think should be encouraged."

### **Towards an Equalized Salary Scale**

Throughout Willis' career, a dominant issue was finding means to improve teachers' salary levels. Evidence for this is contained in the extensive number of laboriously handwritten pages wherein he tried to work out some means by which he could grant raises. Numerous notes exist in his files reminding himself to investigate the personal plight of various teachers.

Teachers were not insulated from the effects of the Depression since the provincial government grants paid only part of the school budgets. At the beginning of the Depression, the Department had worked out a schedule of grants for supporting teachers' salaries. The government's share ranged from 25% to 42% in cities and from 35% to 52% in municipalities. The greatest part went to schools in outlying districts with smaller tax bases.<sup>62</sup> The rest was supplied by municipalities squeezed by reduced tax revenues and by the increased expense of relief for the unemployed. Teachers were required to sustain salary cuts. Having any kind of a job became enviable in the 1930s, and young people looked to teaching as a desirable option. This was discussed in a retrospective of the salary debate:

Salaries of teachers, the last to rise in a boom, but the first to fall in a Depression, began to slide. In some cases the Depression apparently became an excuse to undermine the whole fabric of salary structure erected up to 1929. Increments were denied, refused, and forgotten, and have not since revived; in fact, the idea of

---

<sup>62</sup> BCARS, GR 448. The form letter from Hinchliffe to the school districts was written January 2, 1932.



increments appears in some cases to be relegated to the limbo of the past, and this particularly where the salaries are poorest.<sup>63</sup>

Teachers' spirits were at a low ebb. They were unable to attract government sympathy. As North observed, teachers became less assertive when the cause seemed lost. "Little or no attention was paid to their complaints, however, and teachers had to console themselves with the fact that at least they had jobs, even at low pay."<sup>64</sup> Teachers gained public sympathy and the government experienced strong public backlash a few months later when the Kidd Committee recommended that teachers' salaries be cut by 25% more. After his career-long support for *improving* the salaries, Willis must have found it hard not to show disdain for such a proposal.

In May 1936, the issue of the moment was the establishment of a salary schedule for teachers in Prince Rupert. A request for action and assistance came from the Prince Rupert High School Teachers' Association which addressed themselves directly to Willis, and copied Premier Pattullo. Their delegation had met with Willis at the B.C.T.F. convention over Easter, and Willis had invited them to present their case. The Prince Rupert teachers had been engaged by a civic official, the City Commissioner, each negotiating individual salaries, an almost universal practice at the time. Since 1930, there had been no raises; rather four successive cuts had produced a 33% salary reduction over the period 1930 to 1933. Noting that the cost of living was increasing, and the average salary elsewhere in the province was about 25% higher than they received, the group of ten teachers sought redress through the Department because the financial condition of the city would give them no means of restoring salary levels or prospects for raises. The City

---

<sup>63</sup> B.C. Teacher, 19, 4 (December 1939), pp. 209-210. Article was written by Harry Hayward.

<sup>64</sup> Ray Archibald North, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Arbitration Process" M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1964, p. 88.

Commissioner actually chastised the teachers for making a request for more money, indicating that it would be a hardship on the taxpayers: "It is unthinkable to add to the burdens of those citizens who have made your positions possible." Astutely, the teachers refuted the city's claim to privation, using Prince Rupert's December 1935 financial report, which showed funds were available.

Willis took the side of the teachers. He commented that the Prince Rupert teachers had been treated "rather shabbily." He recommended the Commissioner increase salaries out of Department funds effective September 1, 1936 and that, since the City's finances "are rapidly showing improvement," teachers' own funds should be used to make further increases in teachers' salaries in the next year.<sup>65</sup> It was a fair decision. Willis, in turn, copied Education Minister Weir requesting his advice. Eventually, Weir wrote to Premier Pattullo attaching a memo from Willis. Weir stated in his memo to the Premier, "Personally, I am disposed to agree with Dr. Willis' appraisal of the situation." This was a fine example of teachers standing together to right a wrong. They won their case, and reinforced some sense of control over their employment.

## **THE PEACE RIVER EXPERIMENT AND SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION**

At the time Willis assumed office in 1919, he oversaw 636 school districts. Early attempts at consolidation were meant to contain costs and to offer a fuller range of studies in rural high schools. None was accomplished without controversy, as exemplified by ministerial correspondence. The exchanges illustrate the role of the Deputy Minister.

---

<sup>65</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 8 File 2.

Appointment of an official trustee usually met with considerable resistance. Typical of the umbrage taken was a letter written in December 1934 to Premier Pattullo from the Chairman and Secretary of one of the collapsed school districts of the Peace River region. Their indignant complaint was against Plenderleith's appointment:

We feel that we have been grossly insulted with downright impertinence...by taking away the rights of the people by only the recommendation of the inspector who has only been in this part of the country a little over six months.<sup>66</sup>

A copy of their letter was sent to Willis, who prepared a memorandum for Pattullo. Willis set out Plenderleith's report and assured the Premier that the move to consolidate was made "to remove anomalies in the rate of school taxation and to encourage the adoption of a fair schedule of salaries throughout the district, and generally to administer the schools with even greater efficiency than in the past."<sup>67</sup> Willis praised Plenderleith's ability, describing him to Pattullo as having "excellent professional training" and "wonderfully successful."

An even more impressive measure of Willis' regard for Plenderleith was evident in the 1934-35 Public Schools Report. There, Plenderleith's persuasive report was incorporated into Willis' report on the consolidation project, using much the same order and phrasing as in Plenderleith's August 30, 1934 report to Willis about the consolidation's impact.<sup>68</sup> The entire text of Plenderleith's report eventually was included in the King Report. Plenderleith credited Willis for his encouragement, official support and suggestions:

On September 6th [1934] I received a reply from Dr. Willis, telling me that on the whole he was in favour of my suggestions. Dr. Willis very wisely (as I now

---

<sup>66</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 2, File 2. Letter dated December 2, 1934.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Memorandum dated December 13, 1934.

<sup>68</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1934-35 (Victoria: King's Printer, 1935), p. S 28.

realize) suggested that it would be advisable to make a few experimental groups of seven or eight schools each, in which we could experiment with the administration of the larger unit.<sup>69</sup>

On October 9, 1934, Inspector William Plenderleith had amalgamated a group of fourteen small rural districts into one to be known as Central Peace. He placed the Government Agent at Pouce Coupe in charge as Official Trustee. Plenderleith also placed another six rural school districts under a larger one known as the North Peace Rural School District; and ten others became the East Peace Rural School District. Coleman Creek was the fourth district to be created and was to be called the East Peace Rural School District. The Official Trusteeship was transferred from the government agent to Plenderleith by April 1935. Using the Peace River experiment as a case study for his doctoral thesis, Plenderleith revealed that he had tacit approval at the highest level in the Education Department for his amalgamation work. He recorded that Education Minister Weir and Deputy Minister Willis "both expressed the opinion that the formation of larger administrative areas in the rural districts would prove quite as desirable as the creation of rural municipality districts effected in 1906 had proven."<sup>70</sup> To ensure that their support would not be unnoticed, Plenderleith dedicated his thesis to Weir and Willis "who have given the fullest encouragement to educational research in British Columbia, and without whose advice and approval the experimental work in the Peace River Area would never have been attempted."

Such change may have been administratively justified from a bureaucrat's standpoint. To the local residents who had pride in their school and had helped build it, this was a direct attack and a very real threat to local control. Their displeasure was

<sup>69</sup> William A. Plenderleith, "An Experiment in Centralization", reprinted in H.B. King, School Finance in British Columbia (Victoria: King's Printer, 1935), pp. 104-109.

<sup>70</sup> William A. Plenderleith, "A Report of an Experiment in the Reorganization and Administration of a Rural Inspectoral Unit in British Columbia" (Ed.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1936), p. 33.

conveyed in correspondence addressed to Premier Pattullo from two representatives of the Peace River District, H.A. Prier and Frank Plaster. The two-page handwritten missive of December 1, 1934 was retyped for the Premier to read. It concerned the umbrage taken by local people at what was regarded as "interference" by the new school inspector whom the writers rebuked as an outsider "who has only been in this part of the country a little over six months" and who had suggested "radical changes without even consulting the taxpayers".<sup>71</sup>

The detachment of Victoria-based officials from the concerns and sensibilities of remote communities remained a problem until improved transportation and communications networks undid their isolation. Stortz saw this detachment as one reason why administrative directives were not always readily accepted. He asserted that resistance to the central school administration's policies was common.<sup>72</sup> A major problem was, as explained earlier, that the Department had very little information on which to assess conditions in remote communities:

Inspectors were the middlemen through which communication between Victoria and the hinterland was exchanged, but due to poor transportation and communications networks, as well as the large number of schools requiring supervision within the inspectorates, each school was given only superficial attention. As a result, education officials remained oblivious to the complexity of rural school reform.<sup>73</sup>

Before responding to the Peace River taxpayers, the Premier sent a memo to Willis attaching the correspondence and requesting, "Would you mind letting us have your advice in the matter?" Willis prepared a three-page typewritten memorandum addressed to

---

<sup>71</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 2 File 2.

<sup>72</sup> Paul James Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Pattullo recounting the history of issues in the Peace River. Willis quoted from the local inspector's letter of August 30, 1934 which outlined the reasons he believed the local administration was unsatisfactory: few were legally qualified to hold the office of school trustee and of those many were unfit to hold office from an educational standpoint; trustees tyrannized the teachers; and the majority of trustees were not familiar with the B.C. Public Schools Act, and even worse, "in many cases willfully make no attempt to enforce it. This is usually because of fear of stirring up ill feeling with a neighbor."<sup>74</sup> An interesting example of the impact that this particular Inspector had in this situation is contained in the Department's Annual Report of 1934-1935. In his Superintendent's Report, Willis wrote candid comments and offered some insights into problems with school trustees and set out in a formal list the very points the inspector had made, almost verbatim.<sup>75</sup> Small town politics, petty jealousies, greed over which family should receive income from the teacher's monthly board payments, and discipline issues were common causes of friction with the trustees. The inspector elaborated further why the present system of small school districts was unsatisfactory. Willis quoted the reasons offered to the Premier as:

it engenders sectional jealousy among contiguous districts because of differences in tax rates; differences in the attitude of the people toward educational activities; that it limits the possible selection of trustees to a very small section of the population; that once the school district is formed, the members of the School Board are usually unwilling to give up any portion of it to accommodate the needs of a new School District. In many cases the local boards, in this way, retard educational progress instead of assisting it. In the majority of cases in this district, neither the secretary-treasurer of the School Board nor the auditor is qualified to keep or audit account books. This general carelessness which I have found in accounting is not because of deceptive intention but because of lack of knowledge.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 2 File 2. Willis' memo to the Premier is dated December 13, 1934.

<sup>75</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1934-1935, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1935), p. S29.

<sup>76</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 2 File 2.

Willis pointed out to Premier Pattullo that one of the positive results of amalgamation, and the main purpose for it, was that a more uniform rate of taxation could be applied throughout the area. The secondary reason was to increase efficiency and encourage a fairer salary schedule for teachers throughout the district. In the final paragraph, Willis defended Plenderleith as the new inspector in glowing terms, describing him as "a teacher and principal of many years' experience and excellent professional training. He was wonderfully successful in all schools in which he has taught and will, I am sure, do much to stimulate and encourage better work in the schools of the district."<sup>77</sup>

Considering that teacher turnover and sporadic pupil attendance was common, it was a challenge to offer any coherent or systematic schooling experience. Particularly in rural areas, it is unlikely the Department's Progressivism was practiced in the classroom. The Superintendent's bureaucratic detachment from day-to-day problems in the field -- even as late as September 1932 -- was neatly described by a teacher's experience in acquiring supplies. The teacher related his frustration in trying to enrich the classroom experience:

I had to teach grade 9, 10 and 11 Science and I didn't have a beaker or an ounce of acid or anything. So, I wrote to Dr. Willis and asked him would he grant permission for me to buy a science kit provided by the correspondence branch -- which would cost \$10.00. It came and was delivered to the express office in the station at Dawson Creek. And that month, we got no money. The school board got no money, I got no money. The station master wrote to the Department of Education and Dr. Willis wrote me -- and his letters were gems! They were so to the point, and the language! He wrote just a very sharp letter, beautifully expressed. But I was doing the one thing that was, as far as Willis was concerned, was the sin that was unforgivable. I was bringing discredit on the Department. So, I wrote back and told him, in subdued language, that when I got some money I would pay it. I am illustrating a point. Willis and the Department, they had no idea.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Interview July 31, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham in New Westminster. Comments are his recollections of teaching in Dawson Creek, September 1932.

Clearly, frustration with the workings of the Department could influence day-to-day classroom activity. Examples such as this demonstrate the difficulty Willis and the Department faced in carrying out their responsibilities. As this teacher expressed, Willis was not callous, he was unaware.

Yet, during the decade of consolidation experiments, the Department's changes in financial management began to help teachers. The government tried to solve the thorny issue of school finance by applying an equalization factor to account for varying district tax revenues throughout the province. By the early 1940s, all the municipal districts agreed to salary scales, and teachers could now be guaranteed their pay and were no longer beholden to the whims of local politicians or affected by the vagaries of population shifts. Pedagogically, the changes meant more courses could be offered, providing new challenge and interest to the job. Efficient management in a larger district administration meant equipment, supplies and maintenance of schools were more equally distributed district-wide. Socially, teachers benefitted by having colleagues as the number of large elementary schools increased instead of working in isolation. The one-room school began disappearing except in geographically isolated places. This shift was not viewed universally as progress. Many teachers felt a special bond with their small classes and were proud of their schools. One former teacher recalled her distress at the creation of what she thought were "big factory" schools. "We lost something precious and solid when we lost the smaller schools. Any educator who knew them will tell you that."<sup>79</sup>

Overall, consolidation had its advantages. Willis and the Department took satisfaction in administratively improving the system. Public resistance occurred when consolidation involved closing one-room schools to make larger schools. This took

---

<sup>79</sup> Interview August 1, 1983 by Valerie Giles with Hazel Huckvale, retired school teacher in Williams Lake.



decades to accomplish because communities embraced an emotional "ownership" of their local schools, and resisted suggestions that their children should have to travel greater distances to attend. Community resistance was a factor in preventing amalgamation, but at any rate change in education was ever glacial.

## THE 1937 REFORM AND ITS BACKGROUND

The Department had overseen partial revisions of the curriculum every few years, the most recent in 1932-33. After publication of the King Report, the Department of Education announced its intention in the 1935-36 Annual Report to revise the entire curriculum at all school levels. The government's committee comprised five persons,<sup>80</sup> under whom fifteen sub-committees were organized to review the entire curriculum from Grades I to XII, plus that of the technical schools. Work to revise the curriculum began in early 1935, a project which Willis thought important and timely because "recent contributions to the Science of Education justified a complete revision of all programmes."<sup>81</sup> The actual working committees were drawn from a wide spectrum to work under the direction of Education Minister Weir and his Deputy. Willis described the review as a carefully organized plan in which more than 250 teachers, supervisors, normal school instructors and inspectors were selected to revise the programmes of study. Their work would culminate with the issue of new programmes of study for elementary and junior high schools in time for school opening in 1936.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> B.C. Teacher, 14, 10 (June 1935), p. 1. The appointees were: D.L. MacLaurin, Chairman, Assistant Superintendent of Education; H.B. King, Vancouver; H.N. MacCorkindale, Superintendent of Schools, Vancouver; C.B. Wood, Teacher Training Class, University of British Columbia; and J. Roy Sanderson, Principal, King Edward High School, Vancouver.

<sup>81</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1935-1936, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1936), p. H26.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. H28.

Beyond input from appointed members, Willis acknowledged there could be valuable contributions from others, and explained that "all teachers, school trustees, parent-teacher associations, industrial leaders, and local councils of women" were invited to submit their suggestions for improving the curriculum.<sup>83</sup> The Minister and Willis made an astute gesture in asking for input from these groups.

As each of the main committees met, Willis addressed the gathering to emphasize the importance and scope of the work. Their deliberations produced new elementary and junior high school curriculums in time for the 1936-37 school year. September 1937 brought adoption of a revised plan for Grade 10. September 1938 saw the Grade 11 plan in place, with the announcement that the Grade 12 revisions would be introduced by September 1939. Tomkins' study of the Canadian curriculum described these 1930s curriculum revisions -- 2,700 pages covering all grades -- as "the most comprehensive, self-conscious effort to apply scientific principles."<sup>84</sup>

In any discussion of progressivism, evaluation of whether its implementation was successful must be tempered with the knowledge that the greatest impact was at the official, not the classroom, level. Realistically, "support for Progressive education did not extend far beyond a limited cadre of educational leaders in each province."<sup>85</sup> The Minister's and Deputy's support were not enough to make it happen merely through

---

<sup>83</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1935-36, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1936), p. H27.

<sup>84</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986), p. 143.

<sup>85</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "The Implementation of Progressive Education in Canada 1930-1945," in Essays on Canadian Education, eds. N. Kach et al. (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), p. 85.

influence of their authority. In practical terms, curriculum changes demanded more investment in teacher training, equipment and school supplies. Not much change was in sight until after Canada entered the Second World War in 1939. War industries stimulated the economy and together with increasing land values the municipalities were able to respond to teachers' demands for higher pay by raising taxes. North's research into the history of B.C.T.F. negotiations revealed that the benefits accrued only to those in well populated areas. The result was resentment:

The increasing wealth did not seem to filter out to the rural areas where teachers attempted the almost impossible task of achieving pay parity with city teachers. The most bitter negotiations and arbitrations were conducted, not in the distant school districts, but in the rural and semi-rural parts of the lower Fraser Valley and the Delta. In these areas, boards' budgets were rural but teachers' tastes were urban.<sup>86</sup>

The Depression years effectively stalled the march of educational progress. Willis managed as well as he could in hard times. The fact that schooling carried on to the extent it did was itself a triumph. The educational surveys offer a record of the state of the Department and show how narrow the options were for making dramatic or sweeping changes. Those who hoped for improvements had to be patient. Change was coming, but it belonged to the next decade.

---

<sup>86</sup> North, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Arbitration Process", p. 91.

## Chapter 6

### The War Years: 1939 - 1945

*Often cited as the Civil Servant without peer, Dr. Willis was considerably more than that.  
He shepherded many an Administration past the shoals  
of decision and indecision, and brought about incalculable benefits in the education system  
of this Province.<sup>1</sup>*

#### THE POLITICS OF WAR

On September 10, 1939, Canada declared war and joined in the Second World War. Although the war improved the economy, Premier Pattullo recognized more help was needed and asserted that major public works projects were necessary to bolster economic fortunes in British Columbia. He also tried to negotiate with Ottawa a better share of tax distribution and eventually called an election for October 21, 1941, using educational reform as one of his platforms. The results were: Liberals 21 seats; Conservatives 12; C.C.F. 13 and Labour 1. Being unable to form a majority government<sup>2</sup>, Pattullo came under strong pressure from the other parties, and from within his own cabinet and party, to form a coalition government. Pattullo refused to consider that option, and his cabinet began to fall away in favor of a coalition. Education Minister Weir had lost his seat in the October 1941 election. Still, Pattullo asked him to carry on in the Education portfolio. Weir refused, endorsed the coalition and returned to his work as a U.B.C. professor. In the end, it was Harry Perry who moved the vote for coalition at the December 2, 1941 Liberal Party meeting. The vote was carried and Pattullo left the meeting, resigning a week later on December 9. Perry was sworn in as Education Minister in the coalition cabinet formed by John Hart on December 10. Pattullo was relegated to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Colonist, 1 September 1945, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-one seats was four seats short of a majority.

the back benches and stayed on as an M.L.A. until defeated in the 1945 election by a C.C.F. candidate.<sup>3</sup>

This political upheaval affected all government functions. For Willis, it meant a change of Ministers, his fourth. With new political leadership and wartime deployment of teachers to the European theatre, the job took on new dimensions. Many of the issues and problems Willis had to face throughout the war were very different from any he had coped with before.

On December 7, 1941, when the Japanese air force bombed Pearl Harbor, there was widespread fear British Columbia could become a target. Hart made the decision to move all Japanese, including Japanese-Canadians, to the interior in the interests of maintaining security of the province's coastline. This was a decision with significant implications for the school system.

Immediately following the Japanese attack, the very next day, the Education Department responded by forbidding any further instruction to be conducted in Japanese. On December 9, Willis sent a memorandum to Premier Pattullo requesting the Department's policy with respect to instruction in Japanese be released to the press.<sup>4</sup> Willis told Premier Pattullo: "I may add that yesterday I sent out notice of the Order to all persons conducting such classes so far as they are known to the Department."

---

<sup>3</sup> Robin Fisher Duff Pattullo of British Columbia (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 360. Also Daniel J. Grant, "T.D. Pattullo's Early Career," British Columbia Historical News 13, 1, (Fall 1979): 2.

<sup>4</sup> This was Premier Pattullo's last day in office.

Within the week, Willis began to seek out from his administrators more general policy advice concerning Japanese students. Vancouver Superintendent MacCorkindale received a brief letter from Willis dated December 16, 1941, marked PERSONAL, which asked for his views "on the general effect of the attendance of Japanese children in the schools." MacCorkindale replied on December 19, stating:

I certainly do not recommend that the Japanese children be excluded from our schools because of the declaration of war between Japan and Canada. Why did we not take similar action in the case of the Finns, Italians and Germans, etc.? As you are aware, we have a considerable number of these nationalities in our schools.<sup>5</sup>

The school year continued, with most Japanese children removed from the schools under the direction of the B.C. Security Commission for reasons of national security. By the summer of 1942, almost 1,000 Japanese children remained, and Superintendent MacCorkindale sought policy advice from Willis about arrangements for the remaining pupils. In a letter dated August 26, 1942, Education Minister Perry wrote in Willis' absence to MacCorkindale with a delayed but emphatically direct response:

We have a shortage of teachers at present throughout the Province which may force many of our schools to be closed and this Department would not feel justified, in addition to other reasons regarding responsibility for the Japanese children, in assisting in the provision of teachers for Japanese while our own white pupils are denied the privileges of education, due to a shortage of teachers.<sup>6</sup>

The B.C. Teacher editorialized that "there must be some decent degree of consonance between the ethics of Jesus and a proper policy relative to the Orientals in our midst...who, through no fault of their own, find themselves unwelcome aliens in the land of their birth."<sup>7</sup> While not the kind of humane treatment that Willis, as a Christian, would

<sup>5</sup> Vancouver School Board Archives, Location 56-E-3 File 7, Enemy Aliens.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> B.C. Teacher, 19, 7, (March 1940), pp. 327-8.

have approved, the enemy threat in wartime was strong enough to overcome any other rational course of action. No other correspondence reflects an opinion from Willis.

## **ADMINISTRATION DURING THE WAR YEARS**

During the War, the public urged accommodation of issues relating to the family and to religious instruction. The Education Department recognized need existed among poor rural families. They suffered hardship caused by wartime absence of farmers and farm hands. The Department caused the Council of Public Instruction to adopt special regulations to excuse children from school so that they could help to harvest crops.<sup>8</sup> It fell to Willis to make many of the presentations, and logically so, because he was close to the issues at hand, and eventually would directly oversee their implementation. As Secretary to the Council, Willis also issued the circulars and announced such policy decisions. The Department of Education circulated a notice dated March 30, 1942 to school boards and high school principals "Re: Release of Some Students for Farming Operations". The Council of Public Instruction approved regulations allowing boys and girls in Grades nine, ten and eleven eligible for promotion to the next grade to be released from school after June 1, 1942. The arrangement was to stand for the harvest months of September and October, 1942.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Box 38, File 2.

<sup>9</sup> The following year, the British Columbia Fruit Growers' Association communicated their education concerns to the Premier. Their request was for release of boys and girls from school to help with their harvest. Perry replied to Premier Hart on January 29, 1943, referring to the arrangements which had been made the year before. Since they had proved satisfactory, he suggested that a similar plan be followed.

Willis cautioned that permission for students to take on this employment was conditional. He set out detailed instructions to ensure that the following terms would be met:

1. The terms and conditions of employment were satisfactory to the Provincial Department of Labour.
2. School boards had discretion to have the boys and girls stay in school an extra hour on regular school days during April and May.
3. That effort be made to provide intensive training in the next school terms "as may be considered necessary to bring their work up as quickly as possible to the required standing for their respective grades."<sup>10</sup>

Through the circular, Willis emphasized that employment was not to interfere with schooling, and established that students would be required to accomplish school work by alternative arrangement.

Another instance showing Department responsiveness to public and religious lobbies was the introduction of religious study. Bible Study was introduced in September 1941 for Grades nine through twelve for credit towards High School Graduation or University Entrance. In the Foreword to the text, Bible Study I, the Department stated, "The courses of instruction in Bible Study have been drawn up in accordance with the aims and philosophy of education in British Columbia."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1941-42, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1942), pp. B30 - B31 and Annual Report, 1942-43, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1943), pp. B29 - B30.

<sup>11</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 27, File 2.



Not all public requests were so favourably treated, for Minister Weir was cautious and careful to balance political entreaties with the Department's interests. Those who made appeals for political reasons could not count on his or Willis' support. On May 15, 1939 Alex McBeth, Secretary of the Hazelmere Liberal Club in Cloverdale, had written to Premier Pattullo concerning a resolution passed by that organization about conducting a by-law to establish a Junior High School in Surrey. Their plea was that "the proposed Provincial grant towards the project be materially increased, in view of the drastic conditions now existing among Surrey farmers and in order that the burden of taxation now on the land will not be increased and that Liberalism may get its just recognition in the promotion of School expansion in Surrey Municipality."<sup>12</sup>

The day he received their request, May 22, 1939, Pattullo copied the letter to Willis, asking for a report. On May 23, Willis responded with background on the situation. He indicated to the Premier that, as early as March, the Surrey School Board had been urging the government to provide a definite statement of the amount of the grant that would be provided should a by-law be passed to build a new junior-senior high school building, but gave no indication of sympathy or support for the Liberal Club's plea. Instead, Education Minister Weir responded on March 20, 1939, informing the Surrey Board that he, as Minister, had "no authority to exceed the appropriation voted by the Legislature. It would be quite incorrect to state publicly or to assume definitely, that the Department of Education would make a larger grant than 40% of the cost of the building."

Following the paper trail of this correspondence, it becomes evident that Willis, whom the Premier asked directly for an assessment, was highly regarded and trusted.

---

<sup>12</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 27, File 1.

Normally, the chain of command would have linked from the Premier to the Minister who, in turn, might have asked Willis for input. This example reveals that Willis operated at a ministerial level, and that both Premier and Minister accepted the arrangement.

Willis maintained a keen interest in school curriculum. His work was affected as curriculum took on nationalist overtones once war was declared in 1939. In his 1939-40 Annual Report, Willis noted that the Department would provide a Union Jack to each school. He devoted a section of the report to declaring that patriotic exercises be carried out at least one day each week. Students were to salute the flag and sing the national anthem. Willis instructed:

It shall be the duty of the principals and teachers to endeavour to see that proper ideals of loyalty to our King and country are instilled into the minds of the pupils in attendance and that due respect is paid to the flag and British institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Tribulations of war were weighing on the schools at the beginning of the 1940s. The enlistment of teachers in military service for the war caused a shortfall in teacher supply in some cities. Willis announced that there was not yet any sign of a shortage in British Columbia where the majority of the teaching force was comprised of women.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, population pressures began to affect school rooms as British Columbia saw a new wave of immigration in the spring of 1940. This became the focus of concern and the subject of a report to the Premier. H.D. Stafford, Inspector of Schools in Burns Lake, sent word to Willis May 1, 1940, informing him that 25 Mennonite families would be arriving from Saskatchewan within the week.

---

<sup>13</sup> British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report, 1939-40, (Victoria: King's Printer, 1940), p. B29.

<sup>14</sup> Victoria Daily Times, 24 July 1940, p. 11.

A recent Press dispatch indicates that the Provincial government is accepting no responsibility in connection with the establishment of the Mennonite settlement. Would you please advise me what policy is being adopted with regard to the establishment and support of schools in the district to be occupied by these people?"<sup>15</sup>

Willis passed the request for information on this policy to Education Minister Weir. He, in turn, sent a memorandum on May 8 to Premier Pattullo asking, "Would you kindly advise me regarding the type of answer I might give to Inspector Stafford?" The Premier replied to Weir on May 10th, 1940, saying, "I would be glad if you would have Inspector Stafford look carefully into the matter and let us know just what the situation is."

The message was communicated to Stafford, who responded on May 28, 1940, acknowledging receipt of the request to report to the Premier. "At the present time about eleven of the twenty-five families have arrived and as these families have not definitely selected their holdings, it will be some weeks before I shall be able to prepare the required report." On September 12th, 1940 Stafford submitted his report to Willis. In his letter, Stafford mentioned, "Inasmuch as there seems to be special regulations governing the admittance of these settlers to the Province, I have not made any recommendations concerning the establishment of schools."

Willis sent the report to the Premier. It contained detailed lists of the grain, tools, livestock, farm equipment and money brought by the new settlers. Describing their energetic attempts at homesteading and beginning to farm, Stafford noted that it would be necessary for them to receive government assistance for some time. Although the Mennonites were concerned about schooling for their children, the more pressing problems of arranging food and shelter took precedence over plans for school. Nevertheless, one of the first buildings they constructed was a school. The community suggested that the first

---

<sup>15</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 27 File 2.

teacher could be a woman with Grade 8 education until a qualified teacher could be arranged. Children were able to speak English, having been taught in Saskatchewan schools. Premier Pattullo, Minister Weir, and Deputy Willis were all involved in commissioning Stafford's report. The detailed information on the names, ages and family circumstances of each child indicate the government's intent was to assist them in establishing a school.

On the broader scale, Willis dealt with complaints from parents that text books were changed too frequently. One of Willis' working files contains a two- page draft document of a policy on school text books prepared in the Department of Education and stamped "received" in the Premier's office on June 5, 1941. It concerned the cost of text books and referred to a committee appointed by former Education Minister Hinchliffe to examine text books on British and Canadian history. That committee's recommendation to introduce new books was accepted, and they were prescribed in 1937 as part of the system-wide curriculum reform. It was later deemed that long-prescribed texts (some for more than twenty years) should be replaced with more modern books. The public criticism that changes were too frequent was dealt with and defended with documentation on specific grades, years and titles affected, to demonstrate that the changes were comparatively few in number. The complaints likely reflected wartime mentality that nothing was to be wasted. Willis outlined the free text book policy in a Department circular:

At the beginning of September 1934, the Department changed the policy of "giving" certain text books free to pupils and adopted the practice of sending these books free to the schools on the "lending" plan. The saving from this change enabled the Department to add one free text book to the list in 1934-35 and four other books since that date. The Department spends upwards of \$60,000 each year in free issues to the public schools of the Province.<sup>16</sup>

The document compared prices with the other provinces where costs were about the same.

---

<sup>16</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 27 File 2.

The public at large was insisting on accountability and had developed a watchdog mentality about the cost of schooling. Special interest pressure groups became serious contenders for the government's attention. Willis supported two organized groups, the Roman Catholic Church and the agriculturalists.

Catholics had long sought provincial recognition and financial support for their schools, in 1932 wanting exemption from municipal taxes on school properties. Their next significant push came during the 1941 election campaign. Archbishop Duke had already won the Minister's support, but the government saw fit to deny their request, claiming that Catholic schools were "profit-making businesses."<sup>17</sup> In March 1942, Perry prepared a memorandum to Willis on the subject of supplying health services to Catholic schools. Archbishop Duke had referred to a letter from Education Minister Weir written May 12, 1941. A paragraph quoted from that letter states:

Like yourself, I regard the question of public health services as being outside the field of sectarian dispute and sectarian discrimination; ill health has never known any denominational boundaries and our concern should be for the health of all the people and, particularly, all the children in our communities.

Perry commented in this memorandum to Willis, and copied Premier Hart:

He made a strong case it seemed to me for the extension of our medical inspection to the Catholic schools. I think this is worthy of your sympathetic consideration as the health of the children, notwithstanding they may be in Catholic schools, is a social concern. I should like to discuss this matter with you to get a thorough understanding of the situation, and with a view to seeing if appropriate action can be taken.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Lorne W. Downey, "The Aid-To-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia," in Schools In The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, eds. Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986), p. 307. Funding of health services to Catholic schools was provided by the government in 1951 after the Catholic Health Services offices closed.

<sup>18</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2.

The request was rejected by the government during the 1941 election. Support from the Minister and Deputy in Education was not enough to sway the cabinet. Their stand was that Catholic schools were "private, profit-making businesses"<sup>19</sup> and thereby ineligible for support. The government did not provide health services until a decade later in 1951, after the Catholic Health Services folded.

Another board's unsuccessful funding bid forced it to rely on its own resources. West Vancouver's school board made application in March 1944 to the provincial government for financing to support technical training for their local students at the Vancouver Technical School. This request was denied, and the explanation offered by Superintendent Willis was that "Such a departure from our usual practice would be dangerous. If it were given to West Vancouver it would have to be extended to other outside municipalities."<sup>20</sup>

The stalwart West Vancouver board believed that students with talent for technical work should not be denied training, and set about forming a committee to recommend pupils who would benefit. The board further proposed to assist those students by funding 50% of the fees if parents were not able to afford the expense. Higher property values in the district would have given the board a healthy budget and the latitude to carry out its plan independently. Although there would not be any financial impact on the Department, one can well imagine that Willis would not have been amused at this blatant skirting of the Department's authority.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lorne W. Downey, "The Aid-To-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia," p. 307.

<sup>20</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 47 File 9.

More special interest groups vied for Willis' attention. Those who sought to influence school programs achieved some success. Willis chose the occasion of the opening of a new school wing at Esquimalt High School to comment on his expectations for the future in education. He anticipated the introduction of nursery schools and a comprehensive adult education programme. Immediate changes by the provincial government in 1944 included an increase in appropriations for the purchase of textbooks to be distributed free and an amendment to the School Act to provide for commencement exercises that would include a Bible reading and recitation of the Lord's Prayer each day.<sup>21</sup> In spite of these demands and economic uncertainties during the war, Willis never set aside his concern for teachers.

### **Teachers' Salaries**

In keeping with his longstanding support for better salaries for rural teachers, Willis wrote to Minister Perry October 9, 1942, seeking a change in the Public Schools Act in the way salary grants for teachers were calculated. At the time, the system was based on the number of teachers regularly employed in October<sup>22</sup> of the preceding year and the assessed value of property in the district for the calendar year 1935. Seven years later, property values had increased only slightly in rural areas but greatly so in towns and cities. It was clear that the inequities should be reduced. Minister Perry agreed, and on October 29, 1942 filed a memorandum with Premier Hart recommending a change to the Public Schools Act "to enable our grants for salaries to be based on the 1942 assessment instead of 1935."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The Colonist, 30 April 1944, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Education has carried forth this practice of using October enrollment statistics (commonly called "The Hallowe'en Report") as the basis for calculating financial allotments to school districts, colleges and universities.

<sup>23</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2.

On December 22 Perry again approached the Premier concerning salaries--this time, on behalf of the provincial government school inspectors. He attached the brief they had prepared, supporting it with the comment, "I must confess that I feel these Inspectors have a very good case, and that attention ought to have been given to this situation prior to this year."<sup>24</sup> He also included a detailed recommendation set out by Willis containing specific salary recommendations for each inspector. Willis valued his cadre of inspectors and depended on them to deploy Departmental policies.

Salaries continued to be a subject which Minister and Deputy were asked to consider. On February 16, 1943 Perry and Willis met with a delegation requesting consideration for higher salary grants for the Victoria School Board and an increased grant to Victoria College. Perry presented the two concerns to Premier Hart, attaching Willis' detailed memorandum concerning the requests. Willis recommended against special aid for Victoria City since that assistance was meant to alleviate financial problems in poor districts whose school tax rates were high. "Victoria cannot successfully establish a claim for special treatment, as the school rate is not high and the City Council has been able to reduce the overall tax rate regularly for several years."<sup>25</sup>

Next, the entire profession wanted salaries reviewed. The B.C.T.F. approached the government on May 8, 1943 with instructions from their annual meeting concerning establishment of provincial minimum salary scales. Perry responded to the B.C.T.F. request for cost of living bonuses, pointing out that teachers are employees of school

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2.



boards, not the provincial government.<sup>26</sup> He believed it would set precedents that would invite all civic employees to make representation for cost of living increases. Perry believed, however, that teachers in small rural districts should receive cost-of-living bonuses. The annual increments requested by B.C.T.F. for five years were not deemed adequate by Perry who stated:

The purpose of annual increments is to make the teaching profession attractive as a career, and as an inducement to continue teaching. I do not think increments for five years adequately meet that problem....I am in favour of making annual increments for at least ten years.<sup>27</sup>

Perry's memorandum incorporated a six-page missive from Willis in the body of his report to Premier Hart. Willis offered a general statement on costs in rural and city areas and a detailed analysis of how the grant structure for salaries should be built. Perry indicated that he favoured a uniform education rate to ensure fairer taxation and suggested that the federal government be asked to allow education taxes to be taken as expenses against income. Again, this was but one of Willis' attempts to improve teacher salaries. It was carefully outlined and, as was his habit, included detail on how the scheme could be funded.

On July 5, 1943 Perry again approached Premier Hart by letter, asking that the B.C.T.F. be advised of the government's decisions regarding their requests. Perry summarized his recommendations from the memorandum, those being:

1. That the Government can not entertain the complete proposals submitted by the Federation for reasons of cost.
2. That the Government considers that the cost-of-living bonuses to teachers be the responsibility of school boards as employers.

---

<sup>26</sup> Perry prepared a thirteen-page document for the Premier which was sent to him June 12, 1943 in preparation for a meeting with the B.C.T.F. on June 17, 1943.

<sup>27</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2.

3. That the government will establish minimum salaries for first year teachers at \$900 per annum.
4. That the government will establish teachers' annual increments at \$60.00 per annum for ten years.
5. That the government is considering legislation to provide for a uniform rate of taxation on real and personal property for education purposes, particularly in regard to rural schools and that districts be administered through large administrative units or consolidated areas.

The following table points out the disparity in salaries which carried into the 1940s.

**Average Monthly Salaries Paid to Teachers  
Over Ten Month Periods Each Year  
(Selected Years Before and After Establishment of Junior High Schools)**

YEAR	CITIES MUNICIPALITIES		RURAL DISTRICTS
<u>1930-31</u>			
High Schools	\$243	\$205	\$178
Elementary	\$154	\$126	\$110
<u>1933-34</u>			
High Schools	\$161	\$149	\$155
Elementary	\$113	\$102	\$ 89
<u>1940-41</u>			
High Schools	\$234	\$166	\$155
Junior High	\$182	\$130	\$141
Elementary	\$158	\$110	\$ 91
<u>1941-42</u>			
High Schools	\$236	\$167	\$158
Junior High	\$193	\$132	\$140
Elementary	\$161	\$113	\$ 91

Source: A similar table was presented in Arthur Harold Skolrood, p. 137.  
Constructed from Annual Reports, Department of Education, British Columbia.

Willis sent a further memorandum to the Premier's secretary, Percy Richards, on July 5, 1944, noting that, in August 1943, \$180,000 had been distributed to rural school

boards to provide better salaries during 1943-44. Willis then outlined a table of average salaries which had thereby been dramatically improved.

To the end of his career, Willis championed improved teachers' salaries. He cared about this one issue more than any other and was especially anxious to help rural teachers who were the most disadvantaged in rates of pay. On January 23, 1945 Willis sent a memorandum to Minister Perry regarding salaries for the 423 rural school teachers in the system. He recommended increments for subsequent years of teaching and a bonus of \$100 for those rural elementary teachers holding an academic or equivalent certificate. For school principals, junior high school teachers and high school teachers in rural schools, he set out a schedule to cover salary and increments for the 203 teachers affected.

A memorandum dated the following day offered further tables and calculations concerning the rural schools that had been figured over the seven months of the fiscal year 1945-46. Willis divided his calculations into two proposals, indicating that he did not favour the first, the difference being that the second version allowed for slightly higher salaries. Administratively, the second proposal was simpler because, as Willis pointed out, "The districts need not receive any more assistance if the provincial Government paid the increments. Moreover it is an advance over any schedule in Canada."<sup>28</sup> January 25, 1945 saw revisions suggested to his first proposal introduced and implemented.<sup>29</sup>

Support for improved salaries came from the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Maxwell A. Cameron expressed his views in the spring of 1944, just months prior to his appointment in November as sole Commissioner of

---

<sup>28</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 47 File 9.

<sup>29</sup> Teachers negotiated a province-wide salary scale with the government in 1927.

a study to inquire into the distribution of educational costs in British Columbia. His remarks forecast the recommendations he would eventually make in his 1945 report:

Teachers' salaries in most Canadian communities are insufficient to attract and retain an able and well-trained personnel. I consider a minimum salary of around \$900 per year sufficient for an inexperienced normal school graduate without a university education, especially if normal school fees are small and bursaries are available. The minimum is not as important as a salary schedule with regular increments based on training and experience which would assure prospective teachers of a reasonable standard of living and good opportunity for their children in rural areas. Improved administrative units are necessary for satisfying professional work.<sup>30</sup>

On January 29, 1945 Willis sent a memorandum to Mr. J.V. Fisher, Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance, regarding rural school teachers' salaries for 1945-46. This memorandum concerned bringing their salaries up to minimum amounts according to the new schedules being considered. Willis suggested to him, "If the \$180,000 vote for rural school teachers' salaries were increased by 25% the new minimum salaries could be brought into effect without placing any burden on the rural districts."<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, rural schools experienced a shortfall in teaching staff during 1945, necessitating the closure of fifteen schools. Willis expected this situation would be relieved by servicemen who were returning to the teaching profession.<sup>32</sup>

The future looked brighter after Premier Hart's negotiating skill with Ottawa won an improved tax-sharing agreement. The terms of the formula he negotiated resulted in a doubling of the funds allocated to British Columbia from the levels preceding the Second World War.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> B.C. Teacher, 23, 4 (April 1944): 260.

<sup>31</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 47 File 9.

<sup>32</sup> The Times 2 August 1945, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> S.W. Jackman, Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia (Sidney: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969), p. 239.

### Consolidation of School Districts

Like Willis, Education Minister Perry was also a strong centralist when it came to educational administration. He believed that all the rural school districts should be financed and administered by the Department "in the interests of good education, improved administration, equitable taxation and sound financing." In a memorandum to Premier John Hart, written in response to a B.C.T.F. brief, Perry contended that consolidated school districts "have proved their worth from an educational, administrative and financial view-point." Perry also recognized this as an issue with strong political support:

I am satisfied it would have a good effect in the country, and reflect credit on this Government for taking the initiative on proposals that are not original with me, but which have been made the subject of various official reports and recommendations to the Government by public bodies.<sup>34</sup>

Consolidation came quickly. Inspector K.B. Woodward responded to Willis' instructions to investigate the possibility of uniting Trail, Tadanac and Rossland into one school district in a letter dated July 13, 1943. He reported that Trail-Tadanac and Rossland had separate systems which were running efficiently. No interest in consolidation would come from the former, but Rossland would be in favour because it would gain financially. The inspector attached a table outlining how taxation was presently collected, remarking that consolidation would require a revision in consequence of a common system of taxation.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2. Memorandum dated June 12, 1943. B.C.T.F. brief dated May 8, 1943.

<sup>35</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2. Letter and attachments dated July 13, 1943.

Education Minister Perry passed the response along to Premier Hart July 21, 1943, indicating consolidation would not be accomplished willingly by the municipalities. Perry stated, "Any consolidation would have to be done by arbitrary action on the part of the Government."<sup>36</sup>

Perry provided a copy of a report on rural education in British Columbia to the Premier on November 30, 1943. The report had been written by a committee of school inspectors following a two-week work-conference held during the summer. They, together with "certain other Department officials," reported on improvement of the rural school curriculum, the selection and training of teachers, school buildings, and forms of organization including larger administrative units and school consolidation. The 26-page report incorporated recommendations for improvement and concluded with a plea that the financial problem be resolved because:

unless the financial problem can be solved the greater part of the foregoing report might as well never have been written, and we might as well abandon hope of providing for our rural children educational advantages more nearly equal to those enjoyed by urban pupils. More money, very much more money, must somehow be found for country schools.<sup>37</sup>

The conclusion supported Willis' career-long beliefs. The Report poignantly recognized and formally brought those beliefs to the Premier's attention. It was an emphatic plea to redress a situation tolerated for too long. Change was coming, in the form of recommendations authored by Maxwell Cameron. The school districts continued to grow and eventually reached 650 by 1944 when Maxwell Cameron was appointed by the British Columbia government to conduct a one-man inquiry into the issues surrounding educational organization and finance. He recommended grouping the 650 districts into 74

<sup>36</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2. Memorandum to Premier John Hart from Minister H.G.T. Perry, dated July 21, 1943.

<sup>37</sup> BCARS, GR 1222 Box 38 File 2.

much larger units. This was the single most dramatic organizational change which occurred in the Department during Willis' tenure. Consolidation was resisted out of fear for increased taxes, and a hesitation to relinquish local control. Dunn accurately observed that "most rural schools remained a curse to schoolmen struggling to centralize, standardize and professionalize the system."<sup>38</sup>

The Vancouver School Board submitted a brief to Cameron on January 31, 1945, recommending that equitable distribution could be achieved through "the broadest possible basis of taxation, equitably and universally applied to support a broad and efficient educational system." Their submission was presented as an altruistic one, on behalf of the whole province, not in the exclusive interests of Vancouver city. They submitted:

This Board wishes it to be distinctly understood that nothing herein contained shall be construed as suggesting or recommending that any basis of grants which may be decided upon shall discriminate against the rural areas.

This Board recognizes the problem of these rural areas and the necessity for additional assistance whenever any new basis of grants fails to provide sufficient funds to furnish adequate facilities for the pupils, and sufficient remuneration to attract competent teachers. Without equality of educational opportunity, we cannot hope to create in this province a community of Canadian citizens working in harmony for the common good.<sup>39</sup>

The government placed its hopes for a solution in the Cameron Report's findings. Mindful of Cameron's 1944 pronouncements, teachers must have anticipated that he would discuss inequalities in schooling throughout the province. One historian recorded the problem and solution in simple terms: "His aim was to equalize educational opportunities and this he realized could not be done without equalizing the chances for all areas to attract

---

<sup>38</sup> Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia" in Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, eds. J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980), p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Board of School Trustees of the City of Vancouver, Brief to Dr. Maxwell A. Cameron, January 31, 1945, City Archives, Vancouver, 56-F-3, File 4.

good teachers."<sup>40</sup> Cameron's approach in reorganizing the province involved creating districts that included a major population centre. That centre was designated as the site of the secondary school for the district. Cameron recommended a restructuring to provide:

1. That the administration of education through local school boards be retained.
2. That a Provincial programme of education, defined in financial terms, be made available throughout British Columbia by means of a grant system requiring equal tax rates on all property.
3. That adequate local units or school districts be created wherever in the Province they do not already exist.<sup>41</sup>

Cameron was known to the government. He had taken over Weir's responsibilities at the University of British Columbia when Weir entered politics and, in his own right, Cameron was a recognized authority on educational finance. It was not unusual that the cabinet placed great trust in his recommendations. The government promised consolidation in its 1945 election campaign. Afterwards, implementation was swift, even preceding formal acceptance by the government during the 1946 session of the Legislature. Willis was actively involved:

Carrying out its pre-election promise, the Government proceeded immediately to implement the Report. The necessary legislation involving 120 amendments to the Public Schools Act was prepared by Dr. S.J. Willis in his last year of office as Superintendent of Education.<sup>42</sup>

When Cameron, in 1945, examined the province-wide system of school administration, he ended up recommending that "the Province undertake a thorough re-organization of its school districts."<sup>43</sup> The new economies of scale realized by creating

---

<sup>40</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964), p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> Maxwell A. Cameron, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance (Victoria: King's Printer, 1945), p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> Cameron, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance, p. 85.



larger districts translated into fairness in distribution of tax load and more even availability of educational opportunities by creating areas "large enough to justify a reasonably adequate schooling from grades one to twelve."<sup>44</sup> The large areas would also offer teachers more opportunity for professional growth through association with colleagues and more chances for advancement by dint of increased numbers of positions available in each large unit.

Willis' last major work for the Department involved drafting amendments to the legislation based on the Cameron Report recommendations adopted by the Legislature in the 1946 session. It was, in fact, upon implementation of Cameron's recommendations that rural teachers achieved salary levels which approximated those in urban areas.<sup>45</sup> Willis would have taken great satisfaction in seeing this through. Since the content of the Cameron Report was in concert with Willis' personal philosophy that there should be a more equitable sharing of the costs of schooling and thus a fairer pooling of educational resources, it would have been Willis' delight to produce the 120 Public School Act amendments required.

### **Willis and the B.C.T.F.**

The issue of automatic membership in the B.C.T.F. was one of the last major issues Willis dealt with while in office, although it was not resolved until after he retired. The issue was that British Columbia and Nova Scotia were the only provinces in Canada which

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> The Annual Report for 1943-44 indicated that rural high school teachers were paid \$669.00 less and rural elementary school teachers \$564.00 less than their colleagues in cities.

did not yet have legislation requiring automatic membership in their teachers' professional organization.

Negotiations between the B.C.T.F., which advocated compulsory membership, and the Department, which did not believe in forcing teachers to join the B.C.T.F., carried on. In the end, dissenting opinions on both sides were overruled by George Weir who was once again Education Minister. His support tipped the balance as he carried the B.C.T.F.'s Central Executive's bid for compulsory membership to his caucus colleagues. Legislation was passed in 1947 to grant automatic membership to all teachers in the province. Bernard Gillie was B.C.T.F. President during the debate, 1945-46, and recalled that:

It was because of Dr. Weir and his influence that we got automatic membership. He was very much in favour, I can remember. We put on a lobbying campaign with the cabinet ministers here in Victoria. Weir helped us. He was quite outspoken in his support, and Willis kept very much to the background, at that time. We saw Willis when we went down to the Department from time to time. He was always friendly, but I would say he was taking his signals from Weir. Weir was a very strong Minister.

Gillie detected that Willis' sympathies were in support of the B.C.T.F.'s desire for compulsory membership, but as Deputy Minister his concern was with its implementation and public reception:

That was generally Willis' style, but he was particularly careful with his dealings with the B.C.T.F. because of the fact we were asking for automatic membership -- which was, of course, immediately equated in the public with the idea of unionism and the rest of it. I think that he felt very cautious about that. To the best of my knowledge, I think he felt that basically, in principle, this was a good idea, but to sell it to the general public and the school boards was going to be very difficult.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Interview May 24, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Bernard Gillie.

At any rate, Willis retired in 1945, and among the teachers only twelve chose to object and wrote themselves out of the Federation.<sup>47</sup>

## ACCEPTING PROGRESSIVISM

Against a background of external threats to peace and security, the provincial government's plans to promote Progressive education were hampered even further. Introduction and acceptance of Progressive innovations was dramatically interrupted by the Second World War. Johnson described the disruption of progress in teacher training by declaring "hopes of providing a slightly better quality of teacher for the elementary schools was rapidly changed" by the war. Public forces such as concern for discipline and a shift back to conservative thinking dislodged the gains made by educational innovators in the two previous decades.<sup>48</sup> Traditional teaching methods, still easier and more familiar to the teaching force, became more valued than the newer techniques. The war years worsened the shortage of equipment and supplies. Resources became even poorer for project, laboratory and library materials. Large class sizes, made necessary by the shortage of teachers, further confounded the hope of providing individual training to students.<sup>49</sup>

Since many experienced teachers were employed in city centres, a good assessment of the impact of Progressive education can be derived from the Vancouver district. Attempts at implementation were most likely to occur where teachers had the most experience and were more closely supervised. Sutherland researched recollections of schooling from students who attended in that era. He found that interview subjects remembered a formal school atmosphere featuring strict discipline. Sutherland concluded

---

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia, p. 250.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

that teachers lacked enough appropriate training to adapt and instead clung to familiar, traditional teaching methods.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of wholesale change in schooling, what happened in the classroom was more pragmatic than Progressive. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes were shaped more by what had gone before than by what could be. One very real impediment to widespread acceptance of change was the perception that lack of structure and promotion of individualism were American notions. In traditional British homes, things American were regarded as vulgar, and in the early decades of this century, families of British descent dominated the political and business elite in British Columbia.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, as mentioned in an earlier discussion of borrowed traditions,<sup>52</sup> Canadian educators were influenced by American practice.<sup>53</sup> American conferences were attended by Canadian administrators, and the B.C. Teacher frequently featured reports about and reprinted articles concerning the American system. In fact, Canadian schools depended on the American system for textbooks and educational literature because the Canadian publishing industry was young and limited. Also, more opportunities for graduate work in education existed in United States universities, so those teachers seeking higher degrees were likely to come under American influence.

---

<sup>50</sup> Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver From the 1920s to the 1960s," BC Studies 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986): 175-210.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Barman, Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), p. 93. "If Britain was the ideal, the United States was anathema."

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>53</sup> Robert S. Patterson, "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education" in Essays on Canadian Education, eds. N. Kach et al. (Calgary: Detselig, 1986). Patterson claims that Canadians not only looked to the Americans for leadership but depended on the American system for expertise in educational reform.

A Canadian teacher produced a retrospective "Has Progressive Education Failed?" in the late 1940s. He decried the vagueness about what Progressive education was all about and offered some straightforward reasons for changing the teaching system's goal from its most basic aim -- getting pupils to pass examinations. He argued that "cramming for exams was not real education," pointing out that teaching to university standards affected only the few who would go on to higher studies. Progressive education thereby became what was needed to satisfy a reasonable quest. "Why not broaden the education system to meet the needs of pupils rather than the standards set for university entrance?"<sup>54</sup> Other historians suggested that there were even more expansive purposes to education which included character development and good citizenship.<sup>55</sup>

Progressivism's notions of business-like efficiency and organization did make an impact on school administration. Putman and Weir had recommended creation of junior and senior high schools. As prominent educators in influential positions, the force of their opinions added weight to their advocacy. And, as Johnson observed, "The fact that Weir later entered the political arena and became Minister of Education ensured that the Progressive influence would be a lasting one."<sup>56</sup> Except for the intervention of the war, this would have been true. Certainly for the period Weir headed the Department, he was able to exert his style of Progressive leadership. Promotion of Progressivism became a dominant aspect of Willis' administrative career. His function was, after all, to oversee implementation of Progressive policies and practices in the school system. Most of the

---

<sup>54</sup> S.O. Harries, "Has Progressive Education Failed?," B.C. Teacher 27, 4 (January 1948): 146.

<sup>55</sup> Patterson, "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education," p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A Brief History of Canadian Education (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited, 1968), p. 134.

time he would have found himself in agreement, such as when the junior high schools were created. Willis was himself a strong promoter of junior high schools. In addressing the Nelson school trustees in December 1927, Willis declared his support for junior high schools and stated that children's abilities and readiness to learn were paramount. "The object of a junior high school was to fit the curriculum to the child, not to fit the child to the curriculum."<sup>57</sup>

What was really accomplished through educational progressivism? The imperatives of modernity and the advance of technology would eventually have influenced and changed the course of studies in schools. However, these were not compelling forces in British Columbia's largely rural school system of the 1920s. What, then, were the early attempts at Progressivism really about? There is evidence that the true aim was to create good citizens. This meant encouraging students to take on civic responsibilities, patriotism and future leadership for the betterment of society. Tomkins observed that "patriotism and morality as the oldest goals of the Canadian curriculum remained central aims during the era of the New Education."<sup>58</sup> It also involved espousing British notions of Empire and fealty to the King. J.H. Putman, as one of the movement's most prominent advocates and authors, believed in British values and that society could be changed through promoting them in the schools.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> BCARS, File GR 0467, Vol. 2 (1920-1931), p. 100. The report was originally published in the Nelson News.

<sup>58</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 143.

<sup>59</sup> Robert MacDonald, "Review of B. Anne Wood, Idealism Transformed: The Making of A Progressive Educator (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985)," Canadian Journal of Education 12, 3 (1987): 446.

Willis himself subscribed to British ideals of patriotism to England and Empire. He was fiercely proud to be of British descent and believed that students should develop "loyalty, integrity, a deep sense of duty, consideration for your fellow man, and a wealth of tradition that has made the British Empire what it is today." In the same address he lauded the "courage and determination that was characteristic of the British race."<sup>60</sup>

By Willis' last five years in office, he was highly practiced in his role. He had experienced a lessening of authority with Weir as Minister, but was still the *eminence grise* of the Department. Changing political fortunes brought him a fourth Minister to serve for the last years of his career. Coping with wartime shortages of personnel and more scarce supplies, Willis recommended and implemented policies respecting treatment of Japanese school children, release of students to participate in family crop harvests, introduction of Bible study and patriotic exercises, influx of immigrants, and the beginnings of organized lobby groups. Throughout the war years, Willis kept up his quest to improve rural teachers' salaries. It became a major preoccupation of his last year in office. Assistance was eventually secured after province-wide consolidation was achieved following the Cameron Report recommendations. Willis spent the last year of service putting the legislation in place.

---

<sup>60</sup> The Daily Colonist, 9 May 1934, pp. 3-4. Excerpts are from an address at Victoria High School.

## Chapter 7

### Leaving Office: The Willis Legacy

*It is a good and grand job you have done.*<sup>1</sup>

#### CIRCUMSTANCES AT RETIREMENT

Upon his retirement, Willis could look back on a well-regarded career. He had the satisfaction of seeing in place a workable education system that would serve the province unchanged for three more decades. Eventually, legislation passed in 1973 provided for local control of school boards. This was the first major change in the structure of educational management in British Columbia since the Department was created in 1920.

Education Minister Perry announced the joint retirement of S.J. Willis and H.B. King (Chief Inspector of Schools) on August 30th, 1945. Col. F.T. Fairey, then Director of Technical Education, succeeded Willis. In praising Willis, the Education Minister said:

No words of mine adequately can express my appreciation of the staunch service and devotion to public duty rendered by Dr. Willis during his quarter of a century as head of the department of education.

His high scholastic standing is recognized not only in this province but throughout the Dominion. Now the war is over it will be the policy of the education department to retire these officials who have reached superannuation age, but who have carried on owing to the shortage of experienced educationists in order that opportunities for advancement may be opened in the teaching profession.<sup>2</sup>

Willis' 26-year career with the Department even became the subject of an editorial in The Colonist under the heading, "Noted Educationist":

---

<sup>1</sup> The Colonist, 9 November 1945, p. 11. Remark made by Education Minister H.G. Perry upon presentation of retirement gifts to Dr. Willis, November 8, 1945.

<sup>2</sup> The Times, 2 August 1945, p. 5.



The retirement of Dr. S. J. Willis, Deputy Minister and Superintendent of Education in British Columbia, at his own request, will round out one of the longest and most distinguished educational careers in the history of this Province since the inception of the Department itself. Dr. Willis became its first Deputy Minister, and for years before that was a noted figure in Canadian educational circles...

His elevation in his chosen profession was rapid, and was the result of brilliant scholastic attainments coupled with organizing ability and a successful and facile manner in dealing with superiors and subordinates alike. Students respected him for his fairness, and admired him for his kindly and even-tempered way...

Often cited as the Civil Servant without peer, Dr. Willis was considerably more than that. He shepherded many an Administration past the shoals of decision and indecision, and brought about incalculable benefits in the educational system of this Province.<sup>3</sup>

Willis retired September 30, 1945, and, in November, Perry made presentations of gifts and further commended him:

I do not know anyone in the province who has done more to improve the cultural life of the province than Dr. Willis. It is a good and grand job you have done. No one in British Columbia had done more to advance education.<sup>4</sup>

The British Columbia education system had been a comfortable one for Willis, throughout the twenty-six years he directed it. Prepared for the job through traditional career progression, and hand-picked when appointed, Willis was a creature of the system he was to head. As one of the most powerful schoolmen in the province, Willis no doubt was aware generally of day-to-day Department operations. It would not be realistic to expect that every petition or concern presented would have received his attention.

During the time of Willis' career, effective administration was dictatorial in the sense that one did not consult endlessly with others. An administrator merely got on with the job. Although he did occasionally consult with the profession, he earned their respect

---

<sup>3</sup> The Colonist, 1 September 1945, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The Colonist, 9 November 1945, p. 11.

from a long history of fair and sound decision-making. This is reflected in correspondence with teachers and written communications between himself and his Ministers. In the context of 1920s management, this connoted an ability to take decisive action, and work in the best interests of all concerned. Above all, it meant upholding the dignity and integrity of the Department. One former B.C.T.F. President, Bernard Gillie, recalled that Willis was never dictatorial in a harsh sense. He accomplished his work and took initiatives very quietly, all the while carefully shunning publicity.<sup>5</sup> Willis was keenly aware that his role was to support the Minister, not to assume his mantle.

Willis maintained an aloof demeanor. It was as if he played out a role, drawing about him an air of authority and detachment. Gillie remembers that the Superintendent's physical characteristics and even the arrangement of his office created such an impression:

His appearance lent weight to that attitude of apparent austerity. He had very cold blue eyes, unsmiling. When you walked in and sat down, I can remember so well, you recognized just from his appearance that...he was not very sympathetic. That wasn't actually true, he was, but he covered it. There was a warm and human side to the man but it didn't show up very much in public.<sup>6</sup>

Willis' office was designed to appear intimidating. In a large room, he had a few chairs arranged around a long dining-room style table. Willis would sit at one end and have his visitor take the seat opposite at the far end. The arrangement created both physical and emotional distance. When former New Westminster Inspector of Schools Stewart Graham recounted the time he worked in the Parliament Buildings in Victoria, he recalled being summoned to an audience with Willis:

J. B. DeLong said to me "Dr. Willis would like to have tea with you." That was like an audience with the Pope! Dr. Willis had tea every afternoon and nothing could interfere. He used to, most frequently, have J.L. Watson (Registrar) but you

---

<sup>5</sup> Interview May 24, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Dr. Bernard Gillie.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

were anointed if you were invited for tea. And he never had a group in. Never more than two, three at the most. So, I was taken in and met Dr. Willis.<sup>7</sup>

All the while appearing to be detached, Willis could take action to bring about exceptional treatment, thus revealing himself as a humane administrator. He had the power to precipitate special arrangement or Department action. Within a few weeks of his retirement, Willis demonstrated this characteristic initiative. He approached the Premier's secretary, Percy Richards, on September 10, 1945 concerning twelve veterans who were studying to become Industrial Arts teachers. As part of their training, it was required that they study Educational Psychology and Principles and Technique of Teaching. Willis asked whether two Normal school instructors could be made available to teach the subjects during late afternoon after Normal school classes. Veterans' Affairs was willing to pay the government for the training. The specific request from Willis to the Premier was to be assured that he would agree to payment of the normal school instructors to give the additional courses. The next day, a memo was sent to Willis indicating that the Premier approved of Willis' recommendation.

Willis may not have been comfortable in retirement because he began quickly to put his attention and energy into other work. In the first month he took on responsibility as Chairman of the Victoria College Council at its inaugural meeting.<sup>8</sup> Then, Willis accepted another task two months later -- an appointment from the Victoria City Council to its Library Board for a two year term.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview 31 July, 1991 by Valerie Giles with Stewart Graham in New Westminster.

<sup>8</sup> The Colonist, 21 December 1945, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> The Times, 1 February 1946, p. 13.

The former Deputy Minister's health began to fail in April 1946. He was reported to be in "fairly good" condition as a patient in St. Joseph's Hospital.<sup>10</sup>

In August, another distinction for Willis was announced. The University of British Columbia's President Norman (Larry) MacKenzie told the media that Willis would receive an honorary Doctor of Laws at the fall congregation.<sup>11</sup> The Colonist responded again with an editorial to mark the occasion of this honorary degree to Willis:

Dr. Willis showed himself to be one of the best friends of education in Canada. He has advanced many a cause to the point where governmental policy has followed. He has helped innumerable communities with an understanding ear, and what is more with the courage that comes from conviction. To all, whether of high or humble degree, he has given distinguished public service. Helping still as a respected member of the Victoria Library Commission, to Dr. Willis will go the hearty and sincere congratulations of this community upon a distinction that has been gracefully and abundantly earned.<sup>12</sup>

The News Herald also acknowledged his policy contributions with the comment, "Through his guidance many features of the present Schools Act were passed by the Legislature."<sup>13</sup>

On February 23, 1947, a reception bringing together 130 ex-students and ex-teachers of students spanning three generations was organized in Victoria to honor Dr. and Mrs. Willis. The event was covered extensively in all the provincial papers. The Victoria Times responded with an editorial declaration:

The tributes paid by former students and colleagues to Dr. S. J. Willis at the reception accorded the retired Superintendent of Education and Mrs. Willis this

---

<sup>10</sup> The Colonist, 24 April 1946, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> The Times, 29 August 1946, p. 3. The degree was awarded October 30, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> The Colonist, 30 August 1946, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> The News Herald, 30 August 1946, p. 3. This reference would be to the Public School Amendments Willis made as a result of the Cameron Report.

week are eloquent testimony of the esteem in which this distinguished citizen is held by Victorians and others who have come under his influence and have later made their marks in distant fields. It is particularly fitting, too, that this recognition should be accorded to a man who has for many years exemplified the high type of scholarship and the values of a liberal education in which the world stands in such need today.

Dr. Willis is of that coterie of men who have been an important influence on education in this province. Under the changing systems required by the times, he has helped to preserve that basic spirit which inspires true scholarship, which extends to the affairs of daily living the strength that comes of understanding the humanities. But not only a distinguished figure in a particular field was honored at the reception. Through him an ideal claimed the respect of those who appreciate it. That their numbers were considerable and the sincerity of their expressions unquestioned is evidence of the healthy fibre present in British Columbia's educational world.<sup>14</sup>

Two months later, on April 24, 1947, after enjoying a short retirement, Willis succumbed to stomach cancer. With his passing, a long chapter of educational history was finished. That event occasioned a period of reflection on the events of Willis' long career. Retrospectives of the man and his career were written.<sup>15</sup> The funeral, described in Chapter 1, was as formal and lengthy as if for a statesman. It was a major event, and, like all funerals, evoked a sense of loss and sensitivity about one's own mortality in everyone who attended.

After the funeral service, an elderly man made his way to the front of the church. He walked haltingly and it took him some time to reach the end of the long aisle. In his hand he carried flowers picked from his own garden. He stood quietly for a moment, and then reached out to leave this little bouquet on the casket. The man was Alexander Robinson.<sup>16</sup> His respect for the deceased was strong enough to overcome the memory of being fired by Willis for administrative incompetence twenty-four years earlier.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The Times, 27 February 1947, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> These have been excerpted and appear in the introduction of Chapter 1.

<sup>16</sup> Observed by Stewart J. Graham as one of the most vibrant memories concerning his career with the Department. The event was recalled in an interview with Valerie Giles on

Apparently, the 84-year old Robinson had put aside the career setback Willis dealt him in 1921. In the early years of his succession as Superintendent, Willis responded to the Victoria School Board's request to investigate the management of Victoria High School. Willis found Robinson incompetent to carry out his duties as Principal and asked for his resignation. When he refused, he was fired. Robinson then reverted from administration to the teaching ranks for the rest of his career.<sup>18</sup>

The respect of one for the other had a firm foundation. Robinson's priorities were recalled when he died in 1952, and his career was eulogized:

He had power and exercised it and he made the school system of the province pretty much in his own image. It was a good image at that, for, though he was a schoolmaster of the old school with an abiding faith in Greek and Latin as the foundation of a liberal education, he knew the needs of a pioneering people and a developing country and worked to satisfy them.<sup>19</sup>

Fleming's description<sup>20</sup> of Robinson's origins and career path bears striking resemblances to the man who succeeded him. Willis was also a Maritimer, who, like Robinson, had academic distinctions for university scholarship, a brief teaching career in eastern Canada,

---

July 31, 1991. Graham said "That just shook me...(but) I took a charitable view of it. Because I knew Alexander Robinson, I thought he was just making amends if amends were necessary."

<sup>17</sup> Technically, the Victoria School Board fired Robinson, but they could do so only with an authorization of incompetence from the Council of Public Instruction, of which Willis, as Deputy Minister, served as Secretary.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Lawson Smith. Come Give a Cheer: One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976 (Victoria: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations Committee, 1976), p. 73. Robinson was asked to resign on June 12, 1921 after Willis' report had been received by the Victoria School Board. The Board formally dismissed him on July 28, 1921.

<sup>19</sup> The Vancouver Province, 21 April 1952, p. 4. Column written by D.A. McGregor.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Fleming, "Letters from Headquarters: Alexander Robinson and the British Columbia Education Office, 1899-1919", unpublished article, University of Victoria, 1992.

and had migrated to British Columbia where each served as a high school principal. Robinson had a commanding presence and strong sense of practicality and professionalism, as did Willis.

Willis understood his role, performed it "properly", and generally did what a "good deputy minister should do." He set what he considered should be the tone for professional conduct and was adamant about the importance of upholding the dignity of the Department. As one inspector related, "We were taught how to behave as a civil servant. We were 'His Majesty's loyal servants'." <sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Willis was universally competent and successful. His curriculum review, for instance, was a noble undertaking, but met with the same obstacles that confounded the North American implementation of progressivism. There were obvious practical reasons that the new curriculum did not become a profoundly accepted feature of life in every classroom. For one, in the Depression, at least some ex-teachers had returned to the classrooms chiefly to earn money. They were not skilled in the ideas and practices of "new education" or its more flexible curricula. Normal schools didn't help the cause very much with newly-trained teachers because their instructors lacked Progressive-style training themselves. Fifteen years earlier, Commissioners Putman and Weir had assessed the normal school curriculum as traditional and recommended that it be revised to include modern educational psychology and emphasis on tests and measurements.<sup>22</sup> There were no dramatic differences at the outbreak of war. Johnson also

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview July 31, 1991 by Valerie Giles with former Inspector Stewart J. Graham in New Westminster.

<sup>22</sup> British Columbia. Education Survey Commission. Survey of the School System, Chairmen, J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir. (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), pp.. 227-230.

recorded that "Changes in the curriculum of the normal schools came very gradually."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps a contributing factor was the attitude of student teachers themselves. They wanted a predictable curriculum and, as Tomkins noted, "Inevitably, graduates taught strictly by the curriculum, treating the course of study as a Bible."<sup>24</sup>

## THE OFFICE OF DEPUTY MINISTER

In order to illuminate the office of the Deputy Minister, this thesis emphasized the career of one deputy, the longest-serving Superintendent/Deputy Minister in the Province's history. Written records and recollections of colleagues reveal the thoughts and actions of the man who developed a reputation for being thoughtful, thorough, fastidious in work habits, and with a passionate sense of fairness.

Willis helped define the Department and its function through two and one-half decades in the first half of this century. How he accomplished this is revealed through historical records and the recollections of those who knew him. Although some pieces of the puzzle are missing, indications of his influence exist in partial records. By documented examples and inference, it is possible to argue that his influence was considerable and his impact was lasting. Indeed, it is precisely because Willis was so effective as Deputy Minister that the effort to record his trail is so difficult. He knew how to protect himself by leaving only limited evidence of his role in some of the controversial Department activities.

---

<sup>23</sup> F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964), pp. 211, 213.

<sup>24</sup> George S. Tomkins, A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986), p. 245.



Willis earned respect while insisting that others follow his plans. One example of this is in a B.C.T.F. report on a meeting with Willis in 1926. The Secretary recorded:

He explicitly refused to establish the principle of always consulting the teachers before making amendments to the Public Schools Act, though he assured us representations made by teachers would always receive a sympathetic hearing."<sup>25</sup>

Willis' bureaucratic legacy contains some lessons useful to high officials mired in their own bureaucratic politics. When issues of public policy become subject to bargaining and positioning by people inside government, the result may be a lengthened period between generation of the idea and implementation of policy. More attention is paid to the tactics of getting policies approved and the means of managing their implementation rather than to their substance. Attention is deflected away from the overall political implications of government action. A case can be made that less consultation, not more, would be productive. An historical example is how the site for the future University of Victoria was chosen in the 1950s. Education Minister Ray Williston approached Minister of Defence George Pearkes to have the desired site transferred from the federal to provincial government. He recalled:

We asked him to give us the Gordon Head property so we could turn it over to the University. Just like that. Not umpteen committees. No briefs, no nothing. He had autonomy in his department in Ottawa, so he went back and arranged the transfer.<sup>26</sup>

The tasks of educational management have changed because of the rising power and proliferation of lobby groups. During almost all of Willis' career, there were really no lobby groups. Representations to the Department were diplomatic occasions involving an exchange of information in a conversational setting, among professionals. Modern lobby

---

<sup>25</sup> B.C.T.F. Archives and Records, Executive Meeting Minutes, 13 March 1926, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Interview May 10, 1982, by Valerie Giles, with Hon. Ray Williston.

groups tend to be more issue-oriented and interested in rallying support amongst the public and in the media rather than in a direct meeting. The reason for this is most likely because it results in quicker bureaucratic response to issues. Overall, contemporary officials would benefit from insights into how bureaucratic politics and interest group impact can be contained within the policy development process. An example of such 1940s diplomacy includes the deals made after the Cameron Commission consolidation by some smaller school districts which wanted to preserve autonomy. Summerland wanted to remain apart from Penticton, and Mission from Abbotsford. Each was quietly arranged without extended consultation.<sup>27</sup> They were quickly made decisions that became lasting arrangements.<sup>28</sup>

When Willis came to the Superintendency, there was a government-wide movement towards establishing centralization of authority and putting a bureaucracy in place to control it. Central authorities gained prominence in 1920 with the creation of a distinct Department of Education. Thereafter, the bureaucrats, chief of whom was Willis, not only defined the nature of public education but also assumed the primary role in policy making.

Willis also helped define the role of Superintendent and Deputy Minister. According to British tradition, dating from the civil service in Queen Victoria's reign, civil servants are meant to be non-political, in the sense that they are not elected and do not take an active role in party politics or public controversy. This does not mean that they are not political beings, nor insensitive to issues. Rather, while civil servants are engaged in policy making, they are encouraged or required to maintain a low profile and allow the

---

<sup>27</sup> Recalled by Norman Robinson, then a teacher in the field, who was aware of these negotiations.

<sup>28</sup> Summerland and Mission were never required to amalgamate with their larger neighbours and remain independent school districts.

elected office holders to speak out. As Rose concluded from his research about British Civil servants:

Because politics is about policy making and higher civil servants are concerned with policy making (not mere administration), they inevitably have a political status.

and

The higher one rises in the civil service, the more remote an individual becomes from the everyday administration of British government, and even more attention is given to advising and discussing policy in the more general sense.<sup>29</sup>

The object is to maintain a veneer of impartiality as civil servants before the public.

Another important function of the Deputy Minister role is to maintain the history of the Department and to be able to call up an institutional memory of what has gone on before. As the permanent and long-serving civil servant, the Deputy Minister had an opportunity to do so, and the responsibility to pass such knowledge on to a series of Ministers. Willis well understood that the objective was to develop a departmental viewpoint as opposed to a personal one.

In functioning as Superintendent, Willis had to preside over changes that would not have been his choice, but were the temper of the times. From the province's beginning in 1872 up until 1925, the curriculum taught in British Columbia and the textbooks used underwent a shift from emphasis on Christian beliefs as Ryerson might have understood them to a secular approach. What replaced the Christian theme was a loyalty to Britain and her Empire.

---

<sup>29</sup> Richard Rose, "The Political Status of Higher Civil Servants in Britain," in Bureaucrats and Policymaking: A Comparative Overview, ed. Ezra N. Suleiman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), p. 139.

During the first three-quarters of this century, civil servants at provincial and federal levels functioned in a departmental system headed by a Minister who was political and non-permanent with a deputy who was non-political and permanent. The system in British Columbia would change dramatically under the leadership of the first New Democratic Party government of 1972 to 1975, which turned the appointment of Deputy Ministers away from being a career civil servant position to become part of the baggage of political appointments. The last Deputy in British Columbia's education system to come up through the ranks was Johann (Jo) Phillipson. He had been appointed by Education Minister Donald Brothers during the last years of the Social Credit government under W.A.C. Bennett. The subtle changes were afoot as early as 1970-71 when Phillipson became Deputy. Until that year, all the Department's annual reports were addressed to the Minister and were signed by the Deputy Minister with "I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant." This rather formal and obsequious closing continued in use until the end of Superintendent Frank Levirs' service from 1965 to 1970. After Phillipson became Deputy, no closing was used whatsoever. This abandonment of formality reflected the spirit of the times with its more egalitarian approach, but it also acknowledged that Deputy Ministers were less the "faithful servant" of the past, and were more politically visible and significant as entities in their own right. Phillipson once made the point that it was important for a Deputy to be decisive, to make good decisions expeditiously and get on with the job.<sup>30</sup> The lack of ability to do just that cost Frank Levirs the job, when Minister Brothers passed him over to appoint Phillipson as Deputy Minister in 1970. The evolution of the position into a more political one would not have sat comfortably with Willis. However, Willis fulfilled the dictum that the Deputy be decisive.

Our political system assigns responsibility:

---

<sup>30</sup> Interview January 26, 1984 by Ed Carlin, with Johann Phillipson. Tape and transcript in Valerie Giles' possession.

within the context of cabinet government individual ministers are responsible for identifying issues of future concern and for planning the development of policy responses for matters falling within the mandate of their particular departments.<sup>31</sup>

Public servants are able to exert authority by virtue of their managerial activities on a day-to-day basis. They are also able to make consultations and conduct research to enhance or support their decisions.

In British Columbia, the first formal study of the Deputy Minister role was not conducted until the late 1960s. Rousseau examined the role of Deputy Ministers of Education in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Rousseau found that the Deputy takes responsibility for internal administration and supervision in the Department of Education. Additionally, "the Deputy Minister exercises many of the powers and performs many of the duties designated by legislative prescription to the Minister." Rousseau defined the Deputy's duties as "advising, conferring, consulting, co-ordinating, directing, encouraging, influencing, and warning."<sup>32</sup>

The role of the Deputy Minister in the federal government was commented upon by one historian, who concluded that "civil servants of the higher ranks are interested in what they are doing, and many of them, perhaps most, in power."<sup>33</sup> The quest for power and the attendant authority and influence it brings is well associated with incumbents of the Deputy Minister position. That Willis survived a 26-year career is a tribute to his ability to manage and use, yet not abuse, the power accorded his position.

---

<sup>31</sup> Privy Council Office, "Policy Planning and Support for Ministerial Decision-Making in Canada," cited in Apex of Power: The Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada, ed. Thomas A. Hockin (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1977), p. 48.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph G. Rousseau, Jr., "Some Aspects of the Role of Selected Deputy Ministers of Education" M. Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1968, p. 169.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur Lower, quoted in J.L. Granatstein, The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935 - 1957 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. xii.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Manuscript Sources

- Bowron, Lottie. Daily Journal, (1934), Manuscript, British Columbia Archives and Records Service, Victoria.
- British Columbia Archives and Records Service. Additional manuscripts. (Including Premiers' papers and Teachers' Bureau Records).
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation. "Brief of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation to the Government of the Province of British Columbia Re: Automatic Membership." Vancouver, January 10, 1947. City Archives 58-A-1, File 24.
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation. Minutes. B.C.T.F., Vancouver.
- British Columbia Teachers' Federation. Minutes, Executive Committee. B.C.T.F. Archives and Records, Vancouver, 1916 - 1945.
- Council of Public Instruction. Minutes. BCARS, Victoria.
- Heywood, Stanley. "The Early History of the B.C.T.F." (Undated) British Columbia Teachers' Federation Records and Archives.
- University of British Columbia. Board of Governors. Minutes. Special Collections, Library, U.B.C.
- Vancouver City Archives. Various files. Vancouver.
- Vancouver School Board. Minutes. Vancouver.
- Victoria School Board. Minutes. Victoria.

### Printed Primary Sources

#### The B.C. Teacher

- British Columbia. Education Survey Commission. Survey of the School System, Chairmen, J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir. Victoria: King's Printer, 1925.
- British Columbia. One Hundred Years: Education in British Columbia. Victoria: Department of Education, 1971).
- British Columbia. Statutes. Public School Acts.
- British Columbia. Superintendent of Education. Annual Reports.

Cameron, Maxwell A. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Educational Finance. Victoria: King's Printer, 1945.

Census of Canada

King, H.B. School Finance in British Columbia. Victoria: The King's Printer, 1935.

Report of the Committee Appointed by the Government to Investigate the Finances of British Columbia. Victoria, 1932. (The Kidd Committee)

Revised Statutes of British Columbia

The Colonist, Victoria.

The Daily Colonist, Victoria.

The Daily Province, Vancouver.

The Morning Star, Vancouver.

The News Herald, Vancouver.

The Star, Vancouver.

U.B.C. Annual, Vancouver.

The Vancouver Province, Vancouver.

Vancouver World, Vancouver.

The Victoria Daily Times, Victoria.

The Victoria Times, Victoria.

## Interviews

Brown, D.G. Interview February 5, 1992 with W.A. Bruneau.

Gillie, Bernard. Interview May 24, 1991 with Valerie Giles.

Graham, Stewart. Interview July 31, 1991 with Valerie Giles.

Huckvale, Hazel. Interview August 1, 1983 with Valerie Giles.

Phillipson, Johann. Interview January 26, 1984 with Ed Carlin.

Williston, Ray. Interview May 10, 1982 with Valerie Giles.

## Books

- Allen, Richard. The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.
- Anderson, J.T.M. The Education of the New-Canadian: A Treatise on Canada's Greatest Educational Problem. London and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Ltd., 1918.
- Barman, Jean. Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984.
- Barman, Jean. The West Beyond The West: A History of British Columbia. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991
- Black, Norman Fergus. Peace & Efficiency in School Administration. London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1926.
- Booth, Marion, ed. Pioneers of Bouchie Lake. Bouchie Lake: Bouchie Lake Women's Institute, 1975.
- British Columbia. Education Survey Commission. Survey of the School System. Compilers, J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir. Victoria: King's Printer, 1925.
- Button, H. Warren and Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. History of Education and Culture in America. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983.
- Calam, John ed.. Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991.
- Callahan, Raymond E. Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Chapman, Richard A. The Higher Civil Service in Britain. London: Constable Co., 1970.
- Clifford, N. Keith. The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904-1939. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985.
- Cremin, Lawrence A. The Transformation of the School. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.
- Curtis, Bruce. True Government by Choice Men? Inspection, Education, and State Formation in Canada West. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Dunae, Patrick. Inventory of Government Records Relating to Public Education in British Columbia 1852 to 1946. Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1990.
- Fisher, Robin. Duff Pattullo of British Columbia. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.



- Franklin, Douglas and John Fleming. Early School Architecture in British Columbia: An Architectural History and Inventory of Buildings to 1930. Victoria: Heritage Conservation Branch, 1980.
- Granatstein, J.L. The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Greenlee, James G. Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- Hindle, George. The Education System of British Columbia: An Appreciative and Critical Estimate of the Educational System of the Mountain Province. Trail: Trail Print and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1918.
- History Club of King Edward High School. The First Fifty Years: Vancouver High Schools 1890-1940. Vancouver: Vancouver School Board, 1940.
- Jackman, S.W. Portraits of the Premiers: An Informal History of British Columbia. Sidney: Gray's Publishing Ltd., 1969.
- Johnson, F. Henry. A History of Public Education in British Columbia. Vancouver: Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1964.
- Johnson, F. Henry. John Jessop: Gold Seeker and Educator: Founder of the British Columbia School System. Vancouver: Mitchell Press Limited, 1971.
- Katz, Michael B. Reconstructing American Education. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- Katz, Michael B., Michael J. Doucet and Mark J. Stern. The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Keene, Roger and David C. Humphreys. Conversations With W.A.C. Bennett. Toronto: Methuen, 1980.
- Lawr, Douglas and Robert Gidney, eds. Educating Canadians: A Documentary History of Public Education. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1973.
- MacLennan, Hugh. McGill: The Story of a University. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960.
- Neatby, Hilda. So Little For the Mind. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1953.
- Peake, Frank A. The Anglican Church in British Columbia. Vancouver: The Mitchell Press, 1959.
- Prentice, Alison. The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1977.
- Robin, Martin. The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province 1871-1933. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972.
- Robson, William A. The British System of Government. London: Longman's, Green & Co., 1944.

- Robson, William A. The Civil Service in Britain and France. London: The Hogarth Press, 1956.
- Smillie, Benjamin G. Beyond the Social Gospel: Church Protest on the Prairies. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991.
- Smith, Peter Lawson. Come Give a Cheer: One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976. Victoria: Victoria High School Centennial Celebrations Committee, 1976.
- Stamp, Robert M. The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.
- Sutherland, Neil. Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.
- Symonds, Richard. Oxford and Empire: The Last Lost Cause?. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1986.
- Tomkins, George S. A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986.
- Tyack, David and Elisabeth Hansot. Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America 1820-1980. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1982.
- University of British Columbia. U.B.C. Annual 1916-17.
- Wilson, J. Donald, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet, eds. Canadian Education: A History. Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1970.
- Wood, B. Anne. Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985.

## Articles

- Angus, Henry F. "The Economics of the Kidd Report," B.C. Teacher 12, 2, (October 1932): 20-26.
- Barman, Jean and Neil Sutherland. "Royal Commission Retrospective," Policy Explorations 3, 1 (Winter 1988): 6-16.
- Barman, Jean. "Transfer, Imposition or Consensus: The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century B.C." In Schools In The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, pp. 241-264. Edited by Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986.
- Bridges, Sir Edward. "The Reforms of 1854 in Retrospect." In The Civil Service in Britain and France, pp. 25-33. Edited by William A. Robson. London: The Hogarth Press, 1956.

- Bruneau, W.A. "Towards a History of Moral Education: Some Fundamental Considerations and a Case Study," Paedagogica Historica, 15 (1974): 356-378.
- Burns, William. "The Education System of British Columbia." In British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present, Vol. II, pp. 623-641. Edited by F.W. Howay and Ethelbert Olaf Stuart Scholefield. Vancouver: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914.
- Curtis, Bruce. "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846." Studies in Political Economy 10, (Winter 1983): 99-121.
- Downey, Lorne W. "The Aid-To-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia." In Schools In The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, pp. 305-323. Edited by Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986.
- Dunn, Timothy A. "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia." In Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, pp. 23-51. Edited by J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980.
- Fleming, Thomas et al. "Lottie Bowron Within Organizational Realities and Bases of Power: British Columbia 1928-1934." Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations 5, 2 (1986): 7-31.
- Fleming, Thomas. "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia." In Schools In The West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, pp. 285-303. Edited by Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1986.
- Fleming, Thomas. "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988." BC Studies 81 (Spring 1989): 50-76.
- Gaffield, Chad. "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education," Acadiensis 15, 2 (1986): 169-190.
- Gidney, R.D. and W.P.J. Millar. "From Volunteerism to State Schooling: The Creation of the Public School System in Ontario." Canadian Historical Review 66, 4 (1985): 443-473.
- Gidney, Robert D. "Making Nineteenth-Century School Systems: the Upper Canadian Experience and its Relevance to English Historiography," History of Education 9, 2 (1980): 101-116.
- Grant, Daniel J. "T.D. Pattullo's Early Career." British Columbia Historical News 13, 1, (Fall 1979): 2-4.
- Harries, S.O. "Has Progressive Education Failed?" B.C. Teacher 27, 4 (January 1948): 146-149.

- Houston, Susan E. "Politics, Schools and Social Change in Upper Canada." Canadian Historical Review 53,3 (1972): 249-271.
- Johnson, F. Henry. "The Ryersonian Influence on the Public School System of British Columbia." BC Studies 10 (Summer 1971): 26-34.
- Jones, David C. and Timothy A. Dunn. "'All of Us Common People' and Education in the Depression." Canadian Journal of Education, 5, 4 (1980): 41-56.
- Jones, David C. "The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement: Education and the Myth of the Land." In Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, pp. 71-89. Edited by J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1980.
- Kelsall, R.K. "The Social Background of the Higher Civil Service." In The Civil Service in Britain and France, pp. 23-26. Edited by William A. Robson. London: The Hogarth Press, 1956.
- Lawr, Douglas and Robert Gidney. "Bureaucracy vs. Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System." Journal of Social History 13, 3 (1981): 438-457.
- Lawr, Douglas and Robert Gidney. "Who Ran The Schools? Local Influence in Education Policy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario." Ontario History 72, 3 (1980): 131-143.
- Mann, Jean. "G.M. Weir and H.B. King: Progressive Education or Education for the Progressive State?" In Schooling and Society in 20th Century British Columbia, pp. 91-118. Edited by J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1980.
- MacDonald, Robert. Review of B. Anne Wood. Idealism Transformed: The Making of A Progressive Educator. [Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985.] Canadian Journal of Education 12, 3 (1987): 446.
- McDonald, Neil. "Canadianization and the Curriculum: Setting the Stage, 1867-1890." In Education in Canada: An Interpretation, pp. 93-106. Edited by E. Brian Titley and Peter J. Miller. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Limited, 1982.
- McKenna, Sister Mary Olga. "Higher Education in Transition." In The Garden Transformed. Edited by V. Smitheram et al. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1982.
- Patterson, R.S. "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education." In Essays on Canadian Education, pp. 61-77. Edited by N. Kach, et al. Calgary: Detselig Press Limited, 1986.
- Patterson, Robert S. "Society and Education During the Wars and Their Interlude 1914 - 1945." In Canadian Education: A History, pp. 360-384. Edited by J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970.

- Patterson, Robert S. "The Canadian Response to Progressive Education." In Essays on Canadian Education, pp. 61-77. Edited by N. Kach et al. Calgary: Detselig, 1986.
- Patterson, Robert S. "The Implementation of Progressive Education in Canada 1930-1945." In Essays on Canadian Education, pp. 79-96. Edited by N. Kach et al. Calgary: Detselig, 1986.
- Paul, E.B. "The Educational System of British Columbia," Victoria Times Royal Souvenir Number, (1901): 41-42.
- Plenderleith, William A. "An Experiment in Centralization." Reprinted in H.B. King, School Finance in British Columbia. Victoria: The King's Printer, 1935.
- Privy Council Office. "Policy Planning and Support for Ministerial Decision-Making in Canada." In Apex of Power: The Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada, pp. 48-53. Edited by Thomas A. Hockin. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada Ltd., 1977.
- Rose, Richard. "The Political Status of Higher Civil Servants in Britain." In Bureaucrats and Policymaking: A Comparative Overview, pp. 136-173. Edited by Ezra N. Suleiman. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984.
- Smillie, Benjamin G. "The Social Gospel in Canada: A Theological Critique." In The Social Gospel in Canada, pp. 318-320. Edited by Richard Allan. Regina: University of Regina, 1975.
- Stamp, Robert M. "Education and the Economic and Social Milieu: The English-Canadian Scene from the 1870s to 1914." In Canadian Education: A History, pp. 290-313. Edited by J. Donald Wilson. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970.
- Stamp, Robert M. "Evolving Patterns of Education: English Canada from the 1870s to 1914." In Canadian Education: A History, pp. 314-336. Edited by J.D. Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet. Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1970.
- Sutherland, Neil. "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver From the 1920s to the 1960s." BC Studies 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986): 175-210.
- Wilson, J. Donald. "'I am here to help if you need me': British Columbia's Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, 1928-1934." Journal of Canadian Studies 25, 2 (Summer 1990): 94-118.
- Wilson, J. Donald and Paul J. Stortz, "'May the Lord Have Mercy on You' The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," BC Studies 79 (Autumn 1988):24-58.
- Wilson, J. Donald, "The Ryerson Years in Canada West." In Canadian Education: A History, pp. 214-240. Edited by J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp and Louis-Philippe Audet. Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1970.

Zilversmit, Arthur. "The Failure of Progressive Education, 1920-1940." In Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education, pp. 252-263. Edited by Lawrence Stone. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

## Theses

Campbell, Claude Lane. "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation" M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1930.

Dunn, Timothy Allan. "Work, Class and Education: Vocationalism in British Columbia's Public Schools, 1900-1929." M.A. thesis in Education, University of British Columbia, 1978.

King, Herbert Baxter. "The Financing of Education in British Columbia," Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1936.

MacLaurin, Donald Leslie. "A History of Education in the Crown Colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia and in the Province of British Columbia." Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1936.

North, Roy Archibald. "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the Arbitration Process." M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1964.

Plenderleith, William A. "A Report of an Experiment in the Reorganization and Administration of a Rural Inspectoral Unit in British Columbia." D.Paed. thesis, University of Toronto, 1936.

Roald, Jerry Bruce. "Pursuit of Status: Professionalization, Unionism, and Militancy in the Evolution of Canadian Teachers' Organizations, 1915-1955." Ed.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970.

Rogers, Anthony William. "W.P. Weston, Educator and Artist: The Development of British Ideas in the Art Curriculum of B.C. Public Schools." Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1983.

Rousseau, Joseph G. "Some Aspects of the Role of Selected Deputy Ministers of Education." M. Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1968.

Skolrood, Arthur Harold. "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities From 1916 to 1963." Ed.D. thesis, University of Oregon, 1967.

Smith, Denis Charles. "A Study of the Origin and Development of Administrative Organization in the Education System of British Columbia." Ed.D. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1952.

Stortz, Paul James. "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s." M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988.

Sutherland, John Neil. "T.D. Pattullo as a Party Leader." M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960.

Woodrow, J. "Authority and Power in the Governance of Public Education: A Study of the Administrative Structures of the British Columbia Education System." Ed.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974.