

**THE RURAL SCHOOL PROBLEM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA IN THE 1920s**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines rural schools in British Columbia in the 1920s. Part I (Chapters I and II) discusses difficulties in reforming rural schools generally, and offers an overview of conditions teachers faced in the province's one-room schools. Part II (Chapters III and IV) is a case study of a region in north-central interior of the province. School conditions and the isolated communities in which the schools were located are studied, bringing to the fore the complexity of rural school reform. A wide range of sources was used, primarily Department of Education documents both printed and manuscript which were authored by officials, reformers, inspectors, and teachers. All of these documents are available in the Provincial Archives in Victoria. Local histories, Census of Canada, and a limited number of oral interviews with former teachers were also used.

The rural schools in British Columbia in the 1920s were "inefficient." Pupil retardation in one-room schools was rife, and Department of Education officials saw the teacher, the manager of the schoolhouse, as responsible for the problem. Her unpreparedness for remote school work prompted officials to advocate the creation of "rural-minded" teachers who could readily adapt to rural living. This proposal was ultimately stillborn, seriously flawed by the reality of rural school teaching. The majority of teachers were young, single, female teachers placed in a working and living environment which required physical strength and stamina to meet hardship, as well as mental agility in sensitive inter-personal relationships with community members. The normal school had no hope for success in training teachers to overcome such obstacles. Reform was especially misguided because the remote communities in which the schools

were located were often impoverished, scattered, and transient, and school conditions were greatly affected by the resulting lack of money and fluctuating pupil enrolment. The pervasiveness of these circumstances was largely overlooked by the inspectors whose brief visits to each school was for pedagogical supervision, and especially by officials viewing the province's hinterland from offices in Victoria.

This thesis raises some important questions as to the lack of knowledge urban-minded administrators exhibited of economic and informal political activity in rural communities, and the many problems associated with implementation of Department of Education policies at the local level. As well, the role of community members is highlighted, in particular the influence of their actions on school conditions. Significantly, much of the thesis takes the perspective of the teacher. Her experiences give context to the study of school and community and demonstrate that the solution to the rural school problem was much more complicated than their merely becoming "rural-minded."

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## Introduction

The question of rural one-room schools in British Columbia between 1920-1930 has been almost untouched. Apart from J.D. Wilson "The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s,"<sup>1</sup> and with Paul Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s,"<sup>2</sup> both of which discuss financially and pedagogically inefficient one-room schools, no direct systematic investigation of these small schools has appeared.<sup>3</sup> This dearth of research invites a study of one-room schools, best examined at the intimate level of school inspectors, pupils, community, and particularly the teacher. This examination is essential if a large gap in rural school historiography is to be filled.

Why study the one-room schools of the 1920s? First, they were rural institutions and during this time much of the province was rural. According to the 1931 Census of

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<sup>1</sup>J.D. Wilson, "The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s," in A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings, ed. Patricia E. Roy (Toronto: Clark Pitman, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup>J.D. Wilson and Paul J. Stortz, "May the Lord Have Mercy on You: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s," B.C. Studies (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup>Existing secondary material deals mostly with more general topics in British Columbia rural educational history of the 1920s. To date research has emphasized political and administrative repercussions of educational legislation in the rural areas: see David C. Jones, "We cannot allow it to be run by those who do not understand Education--Agricultural Schooling in the Twenties," B.C. Studies 39 (Autumn 1978): 30-60, and Jones, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chilliwack, B.C., 1919-1920," in Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West, ed. David C. Jones, Nancy M. Sheehan, and Robert M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), pp. 71-89; the failure of curriculum designed specifically for rural instruction: see Belle Gibson, Teacher Builder: The Life and Work of J.W. Gibson (Victoria: Morris Printing, 1961), and Jones, "The Little Mound of Earth--The Fate of School Agriculture," The Curriculum in Canada in Historical Perspective (Yearbook of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, 1979), pp. 85-94; teacher training and its deficiencies: see John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools," B.C. Studies no. 61 (Spring 1984): 30-63, and Jones "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers: The British Columbian Experience, 1914-1924," in Shaping the Schools, ed. David C. Jones, pp. 155-176. Two publications have been concerned specifically with the one-room school but they are broad anecdotal works on the nature of rural school life, interesting but unsubstantial. See Jean Cochrane, The One-Room School in Canada (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1981), passim, and Joan Adams and Becky Thomas, Floating Schools and Frozen Inkwells: The One-Room Schools of British Columbia (Victoria: Harbour Publishing, 1986).

Canada, 277,000 of 524,000 residents of British Columbia in 1921 lived in "rural" areas. The Census defines "rural" as those areas not incorporated into cities, towns, villages, or hamlets.<sup>4</sup> This is a rather restricted definition of "rural," however, as a map of British Columbia in the 1920s shows numerous minute incorporated communities in extremely remote areas.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the majority of schools in British Columbia were situated in the hinterland, far away from urban areas. The Statistical Tables in Department of Education Annual Reports for the 1920s are filled with extensive lists of "rural" and "assisted" schools<sup>6</sup> as opposed to elementary and city high schools. Through this decade approximately twenty percent of all pupils in the province attended small schools.<sup>7</sup>

Third, the 1920s saw the appearance of "progressive" thought as embodied in the "new education" movement.<sup>8</sup> The "new education" movement was defined broadly by Douglas Lawr as "a comprehensive term which generally meant the new purposes, methodology, and subjects which came to be applied to the schools around the turn of the century."<sup>9</sup> Around 1910 the movement was anxious that schools in rural areas promote rural regeneration. As a result of insurmountable economic realities--rural poverty and urban industrialization--the movement instead turned to promotion of vocational training in urban schools. In the third phase, commonly situated in the 1920s, urban and rural differences were blurred in the name of a practical curriculum. Here progressivism became an underlying theme particularly in its belief that students were capable only of

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<sup>4</sup>Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, I (Ottawa: 1936), pp. 364-369.

<sup>5</sup>Many maps of the province during this time which outline geographical and political features are available in the Provincial Archives, Map Division, Victoria, B.C..

<sup>6</sup>"Assisted" was the smallest classification of schools of which the vast majority were one-room.

<sup>7</sup>Calculated from the figures in the Statistical Tables.

<sup>8</sup>See B. Anne Wood, "Hegelian Resolutions in the New Movement: The 1925 Putman-Weir Report," Dalhousie Review 62, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 254-277.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 254.

psychologically-limited achievements; thus the importance of intelligence tests. This belief complemented well the development of specialized courses of study, another "progressive" innovation. Progressive thought in education informed much of the public education policy-making of the 1920s and 1930s, and was in some degree responsible for increased demand for a comprehensive study of the province's educational system, carried out in 1924-1925.

During this educational inquiry, as during the entire period of reform, a great deal of political attention was focused on rural society. Urbanization and industrialization were quickly taking up resources and manpower. Many education administrators worried about the preservation of "superior" rural mores.<sup>10</sup> To many Department of Education officials and reformers the rural schools were the last bastion of a pure and uncontaminated society where "true" values could still be found and taught. "Efficiency"--the progressives' by-word--in these schools, whether as financial expediency or as pupil academic success, became all the more pertinent and pressing.

As the predominant educational structure in rural society, the one-room school offers an appropriate framework in which to study rural education in British Columbia in the 1920s. This thesis will deal with the one-room school in two broad sections. Chapters I and II, which form Part I, will outline conditions in one-room schools before and after the major provincial administrative survey for educational reform, the Putman-Weir Report of 1925. Rural school reform in the 1920s will be seen ultimately to have failed chiefly because distant Department of Education officials were unfamiliar with isolated schools

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<sup>10</sup>In particular John Wesley Gibson, Administrator of Agricultural Education in British Columbia, was at the forefront of the movement for rural regeneration in the face of urban encroachment. Gibson attributed a spiritual character to his plan for agricultural instruction in school and he often stated that rural values must be protected and inculcated in all students in order to save the rural areas. This would lead the province and Canada in spiritual and moral progress. See Gibson, Teacher Builder, 1961, and David C. Jones, "Agriculture, The Land, and Education: British Columbia, 1914-1929," unpublished Ed. D thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978.

and society. In particular, teacher problems and material conditions of remote schools will be highlighted. The second part, Chapters III and IV, closely examines a specific region of the province, the north-central interior between 1920-1930, and outlines the growth and evolution of one-room schools in the district. This will draw out the seriousness of the impediments to school reform, verify school and community conditions summarized in the earlier chapters for the whole of British Columbia, and demonstrate that teaching in a one-room school in the province during the 1920s was a demanding endeavour. At the very least these aspects of rural schooling must be considered in any serious effort to unravel British Columbia's educational history.

Part I: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia, 1920-1930

## Chapter I: The Rural School Problem, 1920-1925

In British Columbia in the 1920s rural schools were typically one room, geographically isolated, and relatively poor. They had a small and sometimes fluctuating pupil attendance, and experienced a rapid turnover of teaching personnel. Such schools were classified by the administrative statuses as "rural" and "assisted" schools. "Rural" status denoted a school that was neither urban nor consolidated and as a result was without the benefit of centralized municipal administration or finance. Still, the rural school on the average was more prosperous than the "assisted" school which was so impoverished that the teacher's salary, erection of the school building (with few exceptions), and the school equipment and supplies were underwritten entirely by the provincial government. In 1926 assisted schools outnumbered rural schools by three to one.<sup>1</sup> Of the 574 one-room schools in the province, 88 percent were classified as assisted, while the remaining 12 percent were rural. Conversely, of 521 assisted schools, 504 were one-room while just 70 of 150 rural schools were one room. Thus there was a 97 percent chance that when the administrators or teachers recorded a school as assisted, they were referring to a one room school.

Particularly in the assisted schools, the progressive educators focused on academic retardation, the antithesis to their idea of an efficient school system. To the progressives who led the reform movement, the perfection of the schools in the province could only be realized when every student was categorized accurately by age and subsequently directed to a appropriate programme of study. This would ensure the smooth transition

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<sup>1</sup>The number of assisted schools was 521. Figures for 1920-1925 are unobtainable as the Statistical Tables in the Department of Education Annual Reports do not distinguish between rural and assisted schools. Each Annual Report was known officially as the Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Province of British Columbia.

of the student into a productive niche in society. Retardation, an aberration in this process, implied that the student was not being properly graded and educated.<sup>2</sup> The inspectors and the commissioners of the Putman-Weir Report determined that rural and especially assisted school students were overage and thereby less intelligent than their urban counterparts according to the proper grade levels as determined by standardized tests. Leslie J. Bruce, inspector of a large coastal district on the mainland, observed that "the standing and progress of pupils in ungraded rural schools was usually far below that of pupils in the other schools of the district."<sup>3</sup> The Putman-Weir Report, which contained elaborate research into retardation, found that the average retardation per pupil (the amount of time a pupil was behind in course work) in the assisted schools was 22.7 months--almost two years!--as opposed to 15.7 and 8.1 months in elementary rural and city schools respectively.<sup>4</sup> Fully 53.7 percent of the pupils were over-age in respect to their proper grade, and just 25.0 to 32.1 percent of all grade eight pupils in the assisted schools passed their grade eight examinations as opposed to 56.9 percent of urban students.<sup>5</sup> These statistics were unsettling indeed to education officials who wanted a cost-effective, scientifically-run, and generally efficient educational system. A.R. Lord of the Kelowna Inspectorate only slightly exaggerated when he asserted that "the rural-school problem is the most serious question confronting educational administration in this Province."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>"By retardation is meant less than normal progress in the grades. A pupil is said to be retarded when he has arrived at a point in the school course which he should have reached at an earlier age." J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir, Survey of the School System (Victoria: Department of Education, 1925), p. 246. Hereafter referred to as the Putman-Weir Report.

<sup>3</sup>British Columbia, Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1920, p. C27.

<sup>4</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 252.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-131.

<sup>6</sup>Annual Report, 1920, p. C34. At times the inspectors referred to both rural and assisted schools simply as "rural."

The cause of the rural school problem was diagnosed to be the teacher. Frequently, the Annual Reports and the Putman-Weir Report expressed concern over the perceived incompetency of the teacher. The attention given the one-room school teacher, however, was as much a testimony to her importance as it was a condemnation of her pedagogical effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> As the manager of the schoolhouse the teacher wore many hats. Ideally she was a role model for the students, usually the caretaker of the facility, a leader in the community where she was expected to help formulate school and community policy, and also the representative of the Department of Education between annual or biennial visits by the inspector. Most importantly she was the educator whose task was to create a stimulating atmosphere conducive to maximum learning. She was solely responsible for the standard of education each student received. In 1921, from Vancouver Inspectorate No. 3 which included some coast and island schools, J.T. Pollock wrote that "It is...the teacher's duty to study, work, and arouse the child's interest; that the pupils must be led to cultivate, among other good habits, accuracy and the power to make intense application."<sup>8</sup>

Was the blame on the teacher well placed? In this respect the Putman-Weir Report and Annual Reports were surprisingly naive. Their attention was drawn to the teacher's lack of qualifications and preparation to work in the remote areas, but evidence suggests that the problem was far more complicated than this. The importance of the teacher's age, gender, and marital status as detriments to her effectiveness was largely neglected as was the effect on school efficiency of the economic and social conditions unique to each community. The reformers and inspectors failed to realize that not even the best-trained

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<sup>7</sup>According to the 1925 Annual Reports, 80 percent of the rural and assisted school teachers listed (n=903) were female. Thus, for convenience throughout this thesis the teacher will be referred to in the feminine pronoun.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 1921 p. F23.

teacher had much control over the restlessness of rural youth or the transiency and impoverishment of the community. In order to examine this oversight this chapter will look at the perception held by the Putman-Weir Report and the Annual Reports of the rural school problem. The reformers' and particularly the education administrators' aspirations were in conflict with the reality of the situation and as a result attempted reform of the one-room school was destined to fail.

### Sources

By considering the one-room school teacher's perceptions of work and community, we get a more in-depth sense of being on the inside "looking out." What was it like to teach in an elementary school in Box Lake, Burton City, Champion Creek, Orange Valley, or Pender Harbour in the 1920s? Being on the outside "looking in" is also valuable as the observations of the reformers in the Putman-Weir Report and the administrators and inspectors in the Annual Reports give an overall perspective of the rural school problem. A comparative analysis of the two kinds of source material make possible more comprehensive inquiry as to why teachers and education officials commented as they did, the accuracy of their comments, and the extent to which individual biases dictated their perceptions.

Unfortunately, the surviving material documenting the one-room school teachers' impressions, experiences, and attitudes toward their work and community is slim indeed. The reconstruction of the life of a remote teacher is piecemeal work. Various diaries and reminiscences contain valuable information, but much of the systematic research done by the Department of Education in the 1920s did not survive the years. Two years of the

Teacher Bureau Records, 1923 and 1928, still exist however--this chapter will deal with the 1923 set--and they throw much light on the teachers' impressions regarding a host of issues related to their job.<sup>9</sup> The Bureau Records consist of questionnaires distributed by the Teachers' Bureau, established in 1920 as a branch of the Department of Education. They were filled out by rural and assisted school teachers to help future rural teachers choose a school to their liking as well as to aid local school boards in securing competent teachers.<sup>10</sup> This source is difficult to evaluate. The variety of responses showed that each teacher obviously had her own preferences and motivations: some complained incessantly about the mosquitoes in the summer, others responded rather unenthusiastically with a singular adjective to describe the conditions--the weather, pupils, parents, trustees, salary, school, and school grounds were all "fair." To be sure, each school and school teacher were different and the historical accuracy of the reports, taken individually, is impossible to verify.

To what degree were these collective observations close to the actual situations? Forces of bias must be considered. First, the job market for teachers in 1923 was constricting and any vociferous complaints by a novice teacher (as were most one-room school teachers) could have been interpreted by education officials as a sign of weakness and unsuitability for the job. In this way a show of contentment was beneficial to the teacher. It could help solidify her position. However, the teacher was also compelled to attack the deficiencies of her employment--including extraneous circumstances such as the climate and terrain--in a lobbying effort for an improvement in her working

<sup>9</sup>The Teacher Bureau Records are officially known as "School District Information Forms for the Teachers' Bureau, Department of Education, Victoria, B.C.". In the Provincial Archives they are filed alphabetically by school according to each year.

<sup>10</sup>See the Annual Reports, 1924, p. T11 for the purpose of the Teachers' Bureau. The Bureau Records contain 658 responses from 1923 and 722 responses from 1928. For this thesis not all the records were consulted, however, because some were completed by teachers of rural multi-room and high schools. Approximately 1,000 responses were from assisted and rural one-room schools.

conditions. Although no evidence exists to confirm these individual nuances of bias, general sincerity of the teachers in the Bureau Records is substantiated by various individual recollections such as diaries and interviews that are quite unrelated to official correspondence. Between the Bureau Records and the reminiscences are common experiences and perceptions.

A comparison between the other major set of primary sources, the Annual Reports and the Putman-Weir Report, uncovers differences in the mood of administrative perceptions. In particular the Annual Reports give a more positive description of remote schools and teachers, and of the entire educational system, as opposed to the Putman-Weir Report. This discrepancy can be partially resolved by understanding the purpose of the two sets of reports. In the case of the Annual Reports, the inspectors were employed to report each year on the general state of affairs in each district by describing the conditions and problems of local schools. They outlined with evenhandedness what was wrong and right with the system as it functioned within each inspectorate. On the other hand, the Putman-Weir Report, commissioned by the Department of Education as a comprehensive stock-taking of the entire educational system, was to recommend necessary changes to make the system as efficient as possible. The Putman-Weir Report's job was to be critical: "It is the intention of the Survey...to point out defects, with a view to their betterment or elimination, than to praise the qualities of the many able teachers found in the schools in the Province."<sup>11</sup> The Putman-Weir Report often examined in detail the nature of each problem and offered specific solutions. Thus, while the Annual Reports described, the Putman-Weir Report explained, and in this way the Putman-Weir Report appeared far more critical than the Annual Reports.

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<sup>11</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 132.

A look at the authors of the two sets of reports reveals important biases that may have distorted the true picture of the remote school. Dr. J. Harold Putman and Dr. George M. Weir, the authors of the Putman-Weir Report, entered the educational scene in British Columbia with doctorates in education and experience in educational research. Putman came from Ottawa, and Weir, a professor of education at the University of British Columbia, originally was from Saskatchewan. Their political separation from the Department of Education in Victoria allowed them to comment without worry of jeopardizing their jobs; their pens were free to commend or condemn. Objectivity was compromised, however, because Putman and Weir were liberal and progressive. Their report was deeply influenced by personal philosophic outlooks. Whatever did not fit into their idea of progressive pedagogy was censured.<sup>12</sup> During the commissioners' whirlwind fact-finding tours of the province in 1924-1925, people became aware in various public meetings that the commissioners had "embarked on the task with preconceived notions and not with an open mind."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately the report was heavily laden with cynicism and sarcasm, and disproportionately negative in relation to the real situation.

In contrast, the Annual Reports were unduly positive because the inspectors were tied intimately to the Department of Education and their views were valued highly in teaching circles.<sup>14</sup> Their negative comments were more likely to be damaging to colleagues with whom they were in constant contact. Normal school staffs often included ex-inspectors and as a result any condemnation of the quality of the rural and assisted school teachers was seen as a criticism to members and friends of their own profession.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while the Putman-Weir Report was hampered by ideological biases,

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<sup>12</sup>See ibid., pp. 24-70.

<sup>13</sup>Wood, "Hegelian Resolutions," p. 259.

<sup>14</sup>Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," p. 61.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-63.

the Annual Reports suffered from political and administrative concerns. Taken together these reports plus the Bureau Records and teacher reminiscences and recollections provide a fairly large amount of source material which can be used to suggest that rural school reform was in fact a complex issue.

The Putman-Weir Report and Annual Reports identified the teacher as the reason underlying the problem of the remote school. In particular they blamed pupil retardation on archaic teaching practices. Isolated from the new atmosphere of progressive inquiry in the city normal schools and unwilling to update her education through summer school,<sup>16</sup> the teacher "lost [her] studious habits" and fell "into the rut of old-fogeyism, routine and drudgery."<sup>17</sup> She sustained "formalism," an obsolete style of teaching which was condemned especially by the Putman-Weir Report as the nemesis to modern progressive education. Instead of leading active discussions with the pupils based on a curriculum designed for practical purposes (e.g. bookkeeping rather than mathematics), the teacher's schoolhouse pedagogy was characterized by oppressive discipline and rote learning. H.H. Mackenzie of the Vancouver Inspectorate No. 5, which included small schools in Maple Ridge, Matsqui, Mission, and Abbotsford, noted the results of this inflexible form of instruction:

There is still in the majority of our schools too much "text-book teaching" and too little oral and mental work. In rural schools generally...about 90 percent of all recognized talking is done by the teacher. Under such conditions it is futile to expect any real development of language-power on the part of the pupils.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Many inspectors commented on the teachers' lack of enthusiasm to attend summer school. See especially Annual Report, 1921, p. F63; 1922, p. C27; 1923, pp. F29, F38; and 1924, p. T50.

<sup>17</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup>Annual Report, 1923, p. F29. For other inspectors' reports of rigid teaching practises in remote schools, see 1920, p. C30; 1921, p. F28; and 1923, pp. F28, F30.

As usual the Putman-Weir Report was more explicit and condemning:

This trilogy of "discipline"--marching, sitting, and speaking according to the rule--is characteristic of the formalist in the class-room. Formal disciplinary methods of instruction, blindly accepted, complete his pedagogical equipment. Instead of a philosophy of education, however elementary, or a working knowledge of educational psychology, his chief stock-in-trade is a box of tricks or a book of notes which he has acquired during the course of his professional training. Armed with this set of tools, which he does not really know how to use, he goes forth to practice on the most subtle of all intellectual or emotional entities--the mind of a child! Dogmatism, formalism, and ritualism are his besetting sins. The credulous worshipper of false educational gods, he becomes a wanderer in the dark, the unsuspecting victim of pedagogical charlatanism and foppery.<sup>19</sup>

As well as the teacher's tendency to run the school like a military camp, the problem of teacher transiency was equally devastating to school efficiency. According to the Putman-Weir Report the most frequent changes of teachers were in rural and assisted schools where the teacher remained an average of 1.62 years as opposed to 2.69 years in the city elementary schools.<sup>20</sup> H.H. Mackenzie again noted, this time in colourful Gaelic:

To [rural and assisted school districts] young inexperienced teachers still come as members of a sort of migratory species; their movements not quite synchronizing with those of Nature's creatures, however, for in soft September days they come and in balmy June they flit away. And there is sadness in their passing, for in these lonely glens the sougning of the wind in the pines, the murmuring of the mountain streams seem to unite in the ancient lament, "Cha till shinne tuille" - "we return no more."<sup>21</sup>

To a great extent market forces determined teacher turnover in the school as teachers tended to migrate from the remote area if jobs were available in larger communities. In general the one-room school was considered by the young and inexperienced teacher as a

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<sup>19</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>21</sup>Annual Report, 1920, p. C26.

training ground,<sup>22</sup> by the older and more experienced teacher merely as a temporary setback, by the "birds of passage" as a "stepping stone" to another profession,<sup>23</sup> and by all as a place to get away from in order to improve their life and career chances elsewhere.

The inspectors frequently lamented the effects of teacher transiency on school efficiency. A.F. Matthews of the Kamloops Inspectorate observed that "In those schools where the teachers have remained on for two or more years the work has invariably been of higher quality and the progress much more marked than in the schools where a new teacher has been engaged each year."<sup>24</sup> Inspector G.H. Gower of Prince George reported in 1922: "The most important problem that faces the rural district is how to retain the services of a competent teacher....the great majority of those teachers who are qualified do not remain sufficiently long in the schools to make a definite impression on the children."<sup>25</sup> Arthur Anstey of the New Westminster district elaborated:

Results in these smaller schools are usually quite inferior to those obtained in well-managed graded schools, and one reason for this is the frequent change of teacher, with all the lack of continuity that such changes entail. In nearly all these schools there are instances of retardation...for rarely indeed does the incoming teacher find a record of each child showing date of entry to the school, details of attendance, time spent in each grade, reasons for non-promotion, and other data which would enable her to gauge the situation and to adopt the remedial measures demanded.<sup>26</sup>

The Putman-Weir Report and Annual Reports attributed the phenomenon of teacher transiency partially to the remote teacher's below-average salary<sup>27</sup> but their attention

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1923, p. F31.

<sup>23</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup>Annual Report, 1922, p. C33.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1922, p. C40.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1922, p. C31. For other reports on teacher transiency, see 1922, pp. C25, C27, C33, C37; 1923, p. F29; 1924, pp. T53, T58; and 1925, p. M39.

<sup>27</sup>See the Putman-Weir Report, pp. 190-192. The inspectors almost were unanimously in

was instead directed predominantly towards improving the teacher's education. They believed that both teacher transiency and pedagogical archaism were related to the teacher's lack of professional training. Inspector G.H. Gower wrote that

A number of the schools in these northern parts are handicapped year after year by the employment of unskilled, temporary certificated teachers, who have little knowledge of our courses, standards, and methods. Inability to organize the work of their class-rooms constitutes the chief criticism of the teachers in the one-room schools of this inspectorate.<sup>28</sup>

The reformers' and inspectors' concern was supported by statistics. For example in 1925 the average rural and assisted school teacher was less educated than the urban teacher; only 4 percent of them as opposed to 10 percent of the teachers in the city held an academic teaching degree from a university, and 23 percent versus 33 percent had a first-class teaching certificate.<sup>29</sup> The rural and assisted school teacher also was much less experienced. The overall teaching experience of city elementary school teachers was twice as great as that of the rural teachers, 7.9 years as opposed to 3.1 years respectively. In addition 48 percent of the rural and assisted school teachers had less than 3 years teaching experience compared to 16 percent of urban teachers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>[continued] favour of increasing the rural and assisted teacher's salary. (See Annual Report, 1920, pp. C27, C30, C37; 1921, pp. F21, F24; and 1922, p. C31). An exception to this unanimity was A.R. Lord who noted that "the salary paid by most of the [rural] schools has been at least \$1,200 per annum, yet teachers remain no longer than when the remuneration was much less--a clear indication that the appeal of the graded school does not lie solely in dollars and cents." (Annual Report, 1921, p. F36). Lord failed to consider, however, that the assisted school teacher on the average was still paid roughly \$300 less than her urban counterpart. See the Statistical Tables.

<sup>28</sup>Annual Report, 1921, p. F39. For other reports that complained of teacher inability, see especially 1922, p. C27; and 1923, pp. F29, F39.

<sup>29</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 181. An academic degree required 3 years of university study plus one year normal school; a first class certificate meant 3 years of high school and one year university OR 4 years of high school (either condition considered senior matriculation), in addition to 9 months of normal school; A second class teaching certificate required 3 years of high school (junior matriculation) and 9 months of normal school; a third class certificate, discontinued in 1922, required 2 years of high school as well as 4 months of normal school; and a teacher with a temporary certificate was trained out of the province. Information verified through interviews with Mrs. George A. Steele (née McDonald) and Miss Mary Pack, both retired schoolteachers, Vancouver, B.C., 13 November 1987.

<sup>30</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp. 186-188.

The reformers strove to remedy the lack of education and experience through the creation of "rural-minded" teachers. The Putman-Weir Report recommended that the normal school instructors improve their own professional training and undertake measures to alleviate the oppressive relationship between the older male instructor and the younger female student. As well, rural-oriented subjects should be included in the curriculum so that training in rural sociology and administration, educational theory, philosophy, psychology, and history, as well as tests and measurements would increase the teacher's understanding of her duties and situation in the one-room school.<sup>31</sup> If this course were followed, teacher discontent and subsequent migration would no longer exist. The Putman-Weir Report strongly suggested the implementation of practice teaching in isolated schools and the development of a system of reports about each remote community especially in relation to teacher accommodation.<sup>32</sup> Similar to one of the Bureau Records' functions, these reports would be distributed to potential candidates for remote school teaching. The wildest hopes of the administrators would be the training of a legion of the "strongest" teachers,<sup>33</sup> rural-minded and well-versed in progressive technique and philosophy, and intent on delivering the highest standards of education possible to isolated children. The Putman-Weir Report seemed to have prudently taken to heart the theme encapsulated in Norman Fergus Black's metaphor in the B.C. Teacher in 1924: "Teaching in an urban graded school and teaching in an ungraded rural school have about as much in common as the grocery business and the hardware trade."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 194, 207-214, and of the inspectors' reports, see especially Annual Report, 1921, pp. F63-63; 1922, p. C28; and 1924, p. T42.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>34</sup>Norman Fergus Black, "Rural School Problems," B.C. Teacher (June 1924): 226-227.

A better-trained teacher was considered somewhat of a panacea to the one-room school problem of pupil retardation, but significantly the reformers failed to take into account the teacher's demographics: she was young, female, and unmarried. In 1925 out of 903 rural and assisted school teachers, 80 percent were female, 87 percent were unmarried, and the average age of the teacher was 23.6 years.<sup>35</sup> Although neither the Putman-Weir Report nor the Annual Reports acknowledged these characteristics of the teacher as possible factors to job success, teacher correspondence with educational administrators in Victoria was permeated with the notion that the remote areas were too rugged and wild for a young, single woman. Mrs. K.E. Easton of the Fort St. John school warned that this was a "...pioneer settlement... would not advice [sic] a lady especially a young one to come here....Zero ladies here. Transportation poor--Mail every two (2) weeks."<sup>36</sup> Miss Janet A. Mill who taught near Pender Harbour cautioned:

At Donley's Landing no place for young Lady Teacher living alone--no society, etc....The situation here I would say is not very good--There is no water at school--no toilet accomodation for teacher. It is only suitable for a male who likes catering for himself. Rowing and fishing can be had as a pastime.<sup>37</sup>

Northern life required a teacher who was familiar with its harsh realities and capable of adapting accordingly. Many of the teachers experienced strenuous conditions of pioneer living. Necessities were often missing, such as running water (if the community was not situated near a flowing stream or river), telephone, and electricity, and basic supplies were dear. In the Bureau Records George S. Quigley who taught in Glencoe seven miles from Soda Creek wrote that the school was "Suitable for married couple or male. Must be prepared to supply own bed and table linen, crockery and cutlery. Water difficult to

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<sup>35</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp.177-179. Figures for assisted schools only do not exist.

<sup>36</sup>Bureau Records. All the records are signed March 1923 unless otherwise noted.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

obtain during winter. Snow and ice good substitutes." In July 1925 Harold Des Reaney wrote to Victoria to make the education officials aware of the inconvenience of scarce supplies in Pachelqua: "Good water year round but inconvenient to obtain. Teacher cannot get supplies locally--will often have to walk to Lillooet and pack his stuff back." Lillooet was eight miles away.<sup>38</sup> From Pineview near Prince George, Ronald Gordon-Cumming wrote:

To begin with, we are in the midst of a water famine and we ourselves have to carry by hand every drop for cooking, drink, washing, etc., a distance of two miles. My home is a bachelor one and I have two boys to bring up so that as well as school to keep me busy I have housework, my farm, mending, darning, washing, and cooking to do for the three of us....Sunday I have washing and baking to do and as we do not get home from school until 5 o'clock (having the janitor work to do) it is seldom before 8 or 8:30 before we are eating supper. At times I feel very nearly like giving up....

We get up at 5:45 in the morning, have to get breakfast, make up our lunches, tidy up the house and then walk nearly 3 miles to school.<sup>39</sup>

Very often, presumably, the young, female teacher would be called upon to fulfill duties other than teaching. She would have to toil just to survive.

At times, the teacher found remote school teaching arduous because of her position in the life cycle. Young and unmarried, she was likely to be eligible for courtship. The Putman-Weir Report mentioned briefly that some teachers migrated out of remote areas to marry, a phenomenon it attributed to the low financial security of the teacher's salary.<sup>40</sup> Other teachers married local people and left the profession altogether to raise a

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid. It is useful here to pause and comment on the Bureau Records. Two points should be noted: First, most of the respondents wrote in the "third person" thus giving the impression that they in fact were not the teacher. Second, the most enthusiastic respondents in the Bureau Records were male while the unmarried female teachers were brief and sketchy in their response. This may be an indication of woman teachers' discontent and apathy in remote schools.

<sup>39</sup>Jones, "Agriculture," p. 357.

<sup>40</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp. 177, 188.

family.<sup>41</sup> Those who stayed faced definite hazards. The teacher had to be on the alert constantly for men with less-than-honourable intentions. Lexie McLeod who taught in Lower Nicola near Merritt in 1921 remembered that the only single male in the area automatically "thought that I should be his girl" and it was a frightening experience indeed when "Alf" entered her room uninvited one night looking for romance.<sup>42</sup> Mildred McQuillan who taught in Orange Valley two miles south Fort Fraser in 1927 noticed a preponderance of "poor niggers" who, after travelling miles to ask for her consideration, were subsequently turned down. The closest she came to a romantic evening was at a monthly dance where she danced with the only man in the hall to whom she was attracted but was reluctant to become intimate with him for fear of the rumours that would start in the community.<sup>43</sup> At times to be young and unmarried was dangerous. Miss Edna Hicks who taught in Olsen Valley near Powell River in 1926 remembered "the shock when a young teacher in a remote spot in Northern B.C. was murdered by a sad young man she encouraged then rejected."<sup>44</sup>

Although documentary evidence of the teachers' amorous adventures is slim, the fact that the teacher was young and unmarried presented specific problems of adjustment. First, the teacher had to be careful in her selection of friends. Indiscreet fraternization in an isolated area could lead to a host of troubles which included invasion of privacy, alienation by a part of the community which disapproved of the relationship, and in the

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<sup>41</sup>Interview with Mrs. Edna Embury (née Hicks), retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 10 March 1986.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Mrs. Lexie Lawrie, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 24 February, 1986.

<sup>43</sup>Mildred E. McQuillan Diary, 1927, Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C.. Although McQuillan's diary is beyond the time frame of this chapter, it is instructive to use because it contains her attitudes toward work and community, and gives an insight into the trials of a young one-room school teacher. Her experiences encapsulate those underwent by countless other naive teachers between 1920-1925. McQuillan's diary will be used extensively throughout this thesis.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with Mrs. Embury, 1986. Mrs. Embury may have been referring to the May 1926 Chisholme murder in Port Essington south of Prince Rupert. Neither the murderer nor the motive for the killing were ever uncovered. The tragedy is discussed further in Chapter III.

extreme, physical harm. The teacher had to gauge her acquaintances and the community politics precisely. Second, considering the conditions within which she lived and worked, an active social life was important for her emotional security and support. In the Bureau Records several references are made to the teachers' general feelings of isolation and loneliness.<sup>45</sup> Often few desirable males resided in the small communities and this encouraged the teacher to leave the area for one with a better marriage market.<sup>46</sup>

Education in "rural-mindedness" could not create an ardent desire in the teacher for celibacy nor could it make the teacher effective enough to overcome adverse economic and social conditions peculiar to each community. Rural school reform was seriously impeded by the impoverishment of the remote community over which the teacher had no control. The Putman-Weir Report commented on the wide discrepancies of the socioeconomic conditions in remote areas of the province: "While urban British Columbia has long since emerged from the pioneer stage of its social evolution, the same cannot be said of the many remote areas of the Province where primitive conditions still prevail."<sup>47</sup> According to the Bureau Records the teacher was surrounded by picturesque scenery and "rough," "rugged," and "wild" terrain; immersed in "healthy," "bracing," "invigorating," and "rigorous" weather where beautiful summers were traded off for "abundant" rainfall in the autumn and "arctic-like" winters. Usually the teacher resided

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<sup>45</sup>See especially Miss Anna Johnson in Gilpin: "This would make a gloomy place for any teacher...the work of the school becomes more or less monotonous"; R. Ballantyne in Cooper Creek Station: the teacher had to "create your own world"; Miss Mary Gernell in Salmon Bench; Miss N.L. Thacker in Powell River: "should not advise a teacher without friends...to accept this school"; Miss V.A. Chastaney in St. Vincent Bay; and Mrs. M. Harris in Christian Valley: "The chief disadvantage is, no mail service. One is "marooned" from the beginning to the end of term."

<sup>46</sup>For example Lexie McLeod left Lower Nicola to "grab a husband" in Vancouver, (Interview, 1986), and although McQuillan struggled with loneliness in Fort Fraser, she married shortly after leaving the community in December 1927. ("Backwoods Teacher," The Victoria Times-Colonist, 31 August 1981, p. 35).

<sup>47</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 124.

in what George E. Welbank of Despaid remote school, thirty miles from Vernon, sarcastically considered a "fair, but not luxurious community."<sup>48</sup> Generally, poor local conditions may have been partly caused by such economic factors as the seasonal nature of the single-industry community, complete exhaustion of the area's mining and logging resources, or crop failure in a community which subsisted on farming. As a result, in some areas the homes were wooden and crude, often resembling make-shift shacks.<sup>49</sup> Concomitantly, health standards were poor. In the Bureau Records, Wentworth A. Smythe in Blaeberry Forde by Golden in the Kootenays wrote that he had "only been here since Xmas. Notice especially poor conditions of pupils' teeth (decay and germ disease)...the need in some homes to combat the deadly fly menace, and the poor variety of food noticed in some homes." Often medical help was distant, and for Gerry Andrews who taught in Kelly Lake south of Dawson Creek in 1923-1925, "living in remote isolation, far from medical services, we simply had to be healthy."<sup>50</sup>

The impoverishment of the community was reflected in the teacher's living conditions. In some areas the accommodation for the teacher was decrepit with few conveniences.<sup>51</sup> Miss J.D. Caldwell threatened to resign because her accommodation in Fairview twenty-five miles south of Pendiction was so poor.<sup>52</sup> Such unpleasant conditions compounded the teacher's hardship and in a rare demonstration of insight by an educational administrator, Inspector A.F. Matthews wrote that improving the teacher's living conditions "would go far towards solving the problem of retaining the

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<sup>48</sup>Bureau Records. Locations of communities cited in this thesis were mostly determined from: The Province of British Columbia, Department of Lands, Geographical Gazetteer of British Columbia, 1930.

<sup>49</sup>For example, see Bureau Records for Cultus Lake.

<sup>50</sup>Gerry Andrews, Métis Outpost: Memoirs of the First Schoolmaster at the Métis Settlement of Kelly Lake, B.C., 1923-1925 (Victoria: Pencrest Publications, 1985), p. 130.

<sup>51</sup>See especially Bureau Records, William George Watson in Woodcock; C. Bertrand in Soda Creek; Miss Annie Haughton who had to row to Hunter Creek School every morning to teach; and McQuillan Diary.

<sup>52</sup>Bureau Records.

services of teachers."<sup>53</sup> He did not offer any solutions, however, as to how the living conditions could be made more comfortable.

The teacher's working conditions were in the same state of affairs. Owing to the poverty of the community, the school itself was often inadequate. School was held in such places as a parent's house, village store, church, social hall, tent, lighthouse, shack, or log cabin. Some one-room schoolhouses were modern, built with lumber, but often even these were too small to house the pupils adequately. Water was as far away as two miles and electricity was a rare luxury. The Putman-Weir Report observed that:

one would not expect to find other than modest school buildings in the assisted areas. The type of building varies from district to district, depending upon the degree of interest manifested by the citizens in their schools and on the wealth of these communities. Some buildings are neat and comfortable. Others are scarcely habitable. In certain cases dilapidated log structures, with numerous defects in heating, lighting, and ventilation, are used for school purposes. The water supply is usually inadequate, while the privies are often found in filthy condition. Especially is this the case in the more remote schools. The school sites, generally unfenced, have a most picturesque natural setting....In fact, every prospect (except the building and privies) pleases until, on entering the schoolhouse, the visitor's aesthetic sense receives a violent shock.<sup>54</sup>

In the inspectors' reports, the general condition of some schools ranged from "dangerous and unsanitary firetraps"<sup>55</sup> to the lack of equipment and supplies.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, a common complaint in the Bureau Records dealt with the school size, lack of lighting, ventilation, conveniences, and supplies,<sup>57</sup> but education officials were hard-pressed to find a remedy.

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<sup>53</sup> Annual Report, 1922, p. C33.

<sup>54</sup> Putman-Weir Report, p. 128. In assisted school areas, the cost for the construction of the building was underwritten by the government once the building was erected; thus, the school often reflected community prosperity.

<sup>55</sup> Annual Report, 1921, p. F23.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1920, pp. C26, C26, C30; 1924, pp. T55, T59; and 1925, p. M27.

<sup>57</sup> See especially Bureau Records for Cache Creek, Champion Creek, Cultus Lake, Johnson's Landing, and Norwegian Creek. Also see McQuillan Diary, and Andrews, Métis Outpost, p. 24.

The reformers and inspectors offered no answers to improve fundamentally the conditions within which one-room school inefficiency was manifest. Instead they skirted the issue and suggested the creation of teachers who could work with and around these obstacles.<sup>58</sup> H.H. Mackenzie speculated that "Where parents, teachers, and trustees work together in harmony for the improvement of educational conditions we shall find better-equipped school buildings, sanitary and pleasant surroundings...."<sup>59</sup>

But how could the teachers influence school efficiency if the community was insolvent? In the Bureau Records Dorothy A. Clarke wrote from North Dawson Creek that "the settlers are very poor and they find it exceedingly hard to get any money together for school purposes." Even where money was available for the school the local people were often parsimonious and uncooperative. F.W. Hobson who taught in Beaver Cove south of Port McNeill on Vancouver Island reported that "This school district has no regular method of financing for school purposes. The amount collected occasionally being grudgingly paid by the residents, who are poorly paid owing to mill not operating. The inhabitants in general are narrow minded."

Local school boards were a particular problem. As in Ontario, they were composed of three trustees elected by local ratepayers and they exercised considerable authority over the day-to-day operation of the school within the general guidelines established by the Department. The local school boards hired the teacher, set the teacher's salary, and controlled the expenditure of funds for the daily operation of the school. The Putman-Weir Report noted that in some areas control over education was placed in the hands of local dictators who harboured "petty...jealousies" toward each other and as a

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<sup>58</sup>See especially the Putman-Weir Report, pp. 128-135, and Annual Report, 1920, p. C22; 1923, p. F37; and 1924, p. T50.

<sup>59</sup>Annual Report, 1920, p. C27. See also 1921, pp. F22, F32, F34; and 1922, p. C33.

result pushed local control to an "illogical extreme."<sup>60</sup> As well, volatile local politics kept funds from being invested wisely. Inter-family disputes were rife and the teacher had to be careful to remain neutral. In Pineview eight miles from Prince George, R.R. Gordon-Cumming confidentially wrote in the Bureau Records to Victoria that

The district is at present divided over a dispute on location and assessment for school, which makes extremely difficult for teacher to be friendly with both parties. I have had to build my own house to avoid antagonizing one party by boarding with the other. It requires much tact to keep on good terms with people all round owing to this dispute.

Often the uncooperative manner of the local people led to teacher transiency. C.B. Christianson in Cape Scott at the northern tip of Vancouver Island observed that "A spirit of jealousy and general distrust seems to pervade this district. Present one is the only teacher who had held position more than two years." Mrs. Christine Kearne in Okanagan Landing similarly saw that "There is very little cooperation between parents and trustees and parents and teacher. Trustees do not work harmoniously together, consequently frequent change of teacher."<sup>61</sup>

In addition to ideological and other personal differences among community members, the very nature of remote society had to be taken into account before any potentially effective means of redressing the remote school's inefficiency could be considered. The Annual Reports mostly neglected the socioeconomic aspects of the community, but the Putman-Weir Report took care to mention the prevalence of alcoholism in some

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<sup>60</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp. 18, 124-125. See also pp. 272-279 where the Putman-Weir Report commented on the disproportionate amount of control local trustees wielded as opposed to their financial contributions, as well as the tendency for the community administrators to use the money for interests other than education.

<sup>61</sup>For complaints about the obstinancy of the local people, see also Bureau Records, Miss Harriet Sanborn in Bowie, Miss Inge Dohlmann in Burgoyne Bay, Miss Bess Roney in Kingcome Inlet, Mervin Simmons in Pouce Coupe, Miss Minerva Granger in St. Elmo, Miss Elvira Walters in Squam Bay, and Miss Helen A. Dewar in Winlaw.

communities as a contributing factor to school efficiency.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless Putman and Weir saw this only in terms of money spent on alcohol vis-à-vis the school instead of in respect to the harmful effects of alcoholism on the pupil's upbringing, teacher's security, and community life. Also overlooked were the implications of the community's ethnic make-up. The teacher was forced to deal with the idiosyncracies of different languages and customs; she was not only in a remote culture, but sometimes in an alien one as well.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the temporary nature of the community made school reform a difficult issue. Many schools were located in areas where economic activity such as fishing and agriculture was seasonal, or where extractive resource industries kept the community alive only until the minerals or local timber were depleted. As a result the teacher was never assured of the school re-opening the following school year because families might well migrate out of the area to make a living elsewhere. The Putman-Weir Report speculated that only one in three settlers in any given remote community was a permanent resident.<sup>64</sup> In the majority of the Annual Reports the inspectors alluded to various rural and assisted school closings (and openings) throughout the districts. Many of the schools suffered from chronic attendance fluctuation and in some areas the teacher was faced with a "procession of pupils."<sup>65</sup> For the teachers, therefore, any long-range plans for the school in the way of physical improvements (if the money was available), or development of a structured pedagogical framework based on projected attendance figures were out of the question.

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<sup>62</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp. 125-127.

<sup>63</sup>Nationalities mentioned in the 1923 Bureau Records are Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, Icelandic, French, Italian, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese, as well as native Indian. For generally negative remarks on the ethnic make-up of the community, see especially Miss Lois Peacy in Koksilah, O.A. Barry in Shawnigan Lake, Miss Mary Binnie in Slocan Junction.

<sup>64</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 124.

<sup>65</sup>Annual Report, 1922, p. C23.

The reformers and inspectors largely ignored the problems of the remote community as significant causes of pupil retardation because their research was cursory. The Putman-Weir Report was completed in a little over a year, and each year inspectors rarely stayed in a community for longer than a day. Each community was given a quick glance; consequently first-hand knowledge of local impoverishment, politics, and transiency was slim. In addition, the "new education" ideology which stressed rural regeneration must have blinded the officials to the sheer complexity and insuperability of some of the local problems. Their hopes for the creation of an army of teachers who could work within one-room schools to improve school efficiency and possibly community conditions appeared somewhat utopian.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, the reformers' and inspectors' almost complete neglect of the teacher's demographics was made conspicuous by the officials' intense devotion to teacher reform. Education could overcome the lack of qualifications and preparation, and to some extent inexperience; however, the teachers' impressions in later reminiscences as well as the persistence of teacher transiency throughout the 1920s demonstrated that the effect of education on the hardship and loneliness of pioneer living was debatable.

Underneath the officials' inattentiveness to some of the major issues in school reform was a host of related factors. For example, the teacher's life and career goals were neglected as potentially pernicious to pedagogical effectiveness and school efficiency. Similarly the pupil's physical and psychological health, family background, upbringing, ethnicity, and past experiences, as well as the parent's occupation and attitudes toward education, and overall community mores were all overlooked as contributors to pupil retardation.<sup>67</sup> The intimate nature of the one-room school made these factors all the

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<sup>66</sup>The reasons why education officials continued to overlook the importance of local conditions on school efficiency are discussed further in Chapter II.

<sup>67</sup>Several recent sociological works have explored the mechanics of pupil academic achievement,

more pertinent. As well they must be considered in light of the facts that pupil retardation was still an administrator's concern into the 1930s and that local interference and rural economic stagnation exist even today. In the 1920s rural school reform was a very complicated issue indeed.

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<sup>67</sup>[continued] especially Wilfred B.W. Martin and Allan J. MacDonnell, Canadian Education: A Sociological Analysis, second edition (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1982), and Frank J. Miffen and Sydney C. Miffen, The Sociology of Education in Canada and Beyond (Calgary Detselig Enterprises, 1982).

## Chapter II: The Rural School Problem, 1925-1930

Between 1925-1930 the Inspectors' Reports in the Department of Education Annual Reports were rife with glowing depictions of the province's educational system. The "sound of going in the tops of the mulberry trees" observed in 1927 by H.H. Mackenzie of Vancouver Inspectorate No. 5 summarized his belief that the "dissemination of the ideas of the newer education" will reap a "bountiful harvest" whereby everyone associated with the work of education will set about to discover the truth, namely progressivism.<sup>1</sup> One year later Mackenzie's ardour had not faded. "The united efforts of all educational forces concerned with the great project of educating the youth of the country and raising up citizens worthy of their great heritage are meeting with ever-increasing success."<sup>2</sup> In their assessments other inspectors were less grandiose but equally enthusiastic. In particular they cited the remarkable efficacy and character of the zealous teacher. A.C. Stewart of an inspectorate spanning the entire east coast of Vancouver Island wrote that "The success attained by schools...is a measure and also a criterion of the efficiency of our public school system, and not only that, but also a tribute to the zeal, interest, and enthusiasm of trustees, parents, and more especially the teachers."<sup>3</sup> In Prince George Inspector W.G. Gamble claimed that the teachers' "...personality and social training have a wonderful influence not only in the school, but also in the whole community, in which they are striving to lay the foundations of education and citizenship for the present and future welfare of this great Dominion."<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup>Annual Report, 1927, p. M34. Inspector's reports for each district are not included in the Annual Reports after 1929.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1927, p. M31.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 1929, p. R33.

the Kamloops Inspectorate teachers demonstrated strong interest in their work and were "...keenly alive to all opportunities for increasing their professional efficiency."<sup>5</sup> A report in 1927 commented that the attitude of the teachers "is most praiseworthy. [They] display a spirit of a true student and searcher after knowledge and truth."<sup>6</sup> T.R. Hall from the Kelowna Inspectorate wrote that "it has been a pleasure to be associated with such an earnest and enthusiastic group..." the majority of whom were of excellent spirit.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in the Annual Reports the commendations for the teachers were numerous.<sup>8</sup>

The inspectors also reported on school expansion and modernization. For example, the Nelson Inspectorate underwent a construction boom as old or temporary schools were replaced by newer, more modern structures.<sup>9</sup> In Kamloops, "Ratepayers are realizing the advantages of providing pleasant surroundings, hygienic buildings, and adequate equipment for the children."<sup>10</sup> The introduction of superior schools in some of the larger rural elementary buildings,<sup>11</sup> and school district consolidation, already begun in 1927, emphasized the need for efficiency in education by extending educational opportunity and centralizing administrative control.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 1926, p. R37.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1927, p. M33.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1929, p. R30.

<sup>8</sup> See also *ibid.*, 1926, pp. R35, 36; 1927, pp. M37, 39, 40; 1928, pp. V21, 24, 26, 30; and 1929, pp. R26, 28.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V29.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1926, p. R37.

<sup>11</sup>Superior schools were programmes of senior elementary and junior high school courses offered to upper level pupils in some elementary schools, particularly suitable to rural conditions "in order that parents may be saved a portion of the expense incidental to sending their children away from home." (F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964), pp. 62-63).

<sup>12</sup>Several reports deal with school expansion, modernization, and the extension of high schools into rural schools. See especially Annual Report, 1926, pp. R36, 39; 1927, pp. M32, 35, 39; 1928, pp. V27, 31; and 1929, pp. R28, 29, and 31. For reports on consolidation, see 1926, p. R34; 1927, pp. M13, 32; 1928, pp. V22, 23; and 1929, p. R29.

According to the inspectors, between 1925-1930 the school system in British Columbia seemed to be philosophically sound, expanding, and pedagogically efficient. New Westminster Inspector E.G. Daniels boasted that "retardation has been seriously grappled with, the results in several cases being particularly gratifying."<sup>13</sup> The age of impoverished, unequipped schools with ill-prepared and underqualified teachers immersed in a close-minded, selfish, and parsimonious community seemed to be drawing to a close. The community, teacher, and pupil were working together harmoniously to provide the best education possible for the pupil.

The existence of this improved educational state of affairs was debatable; for one-room schools it was patently untrue. As with the 1923 set of Bureau Records, enlightening information on the seedier side of the province's educational system is contained in its 1928 counterpart.<sup>14</sup> Scores of reports continued to record difficult teaching conditions and hardship in isolated districts. For example, Mrs. K. Hannan in Sunset Prairie east of Dawson Creek wrote: "This is an isolated district about 30 miles from churches, stores, hospital, trails are bad & there is no telephone communication." F. Julian Willway in Stevenson Creek five miles south of Princeton noted inhospitable community conditions:

At present the teacher is boarded but this family do not wish (sic) to board teacher next year. No house for teacher to batch within mile and a half of school. This house is nearly eight miles from town. This would be a dangerous district to send a young girl to as there are many lone prospectors passing to and fro. The general conditions are [very poor]. There are three families--one a family of nine live in a small one room shack. No idea of sanitation.

William McDonagh's accommodation in Pachelqua by Lillooet was a "lean-to shack, airy

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1929, p. R36.

<sup>14</sup>The Bureau Records used in this chapter all are dated the spring of 1928.

and leaky...unfit for human habitation, and it is impracticable to improve it as material must be transported over steep hills." In Bear Flats near Peace River, the school was in similar shape. Mrs. Jean Gething reported the the school "needs a new floor, new stove, new roofing....Building is very cold as the cracks between the logs are open and need chinking and mudding." Into the latter half of the decade conditions in several communities remained "very primitive."

In some communities parents and trustees were still far from co-operative. Harold J. Bradley wrote that the residents of Burgoyne Bay on the west coast of Saltspring Island have the attitude that "what was good enough for them forty years ago is good enough for the children of today." At times community politics was tense and this affected the academic potential of the pupils. In Stuart River east of Vanderhoof, J. Harry Downard recorded that "There is a great deal of jealousy and quarreling over where teacher boards. This spirit is carried by the parents towards the teacher, and some of the pupils carry this attitude into class with them, making this a very difficult and unpleasant district to live in."

Were teachers content in these isolated regions? J.C. Lynch in South Fort George pleaded for an increase in salary, five teachers in the Bureau Records wanted to get "out" of the community<sup>15</sup> and Mrs. Margaret Manning (née Lanyon) who taught in Black Canyon in 1926 felt "stuck" in the community and despite accepting a pay cut left for a less isolated school at Dewdney.<sup>16</sup> The teachers in remote schools may have been enthusiastic but not overly content.

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<sup>15</sup>Bureau Records, Mrs. Helener McRae in Eagle Bay, Miss Pansy Price in Dog Creek, Miss E.L. Rankin in Grey Creek, Miss Ivy Harper in Hendon, and Miss Helen R. Wilkinson in Fife.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Mrs. Margaret Manning, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 12 April 1987.

When comparing the educational administrators' perspective as seen through the eyes of the inspectors and the experiences of the teacher in the field, it becomes clear that the Department of Education continued to hold a misconstrued idea of the nature of rural school teaching. The lack of understanding of isolated teaching was evident initially between 1920-1925 when education officials and reformers attended to the problem of rural school inefficiency by concentrating on the improvement of teacher training. The teacher was considered a solution whereby the creation of better teachers who could act as an effective pedagogue and community leader and be capable of handling and appreciating the stress, hardship, and idiosyncracies of isolated teaching would raise the remote school out of the oppressive cloud of academic retardation. This chapter will expose the fallacy of this belief in the success of creating rural-minded teachers on two levels. First, between 1925-1930 the administrators surmised that the predominance of what seemed to be better prepared rural school teachers was the result of improvement in normal school instruction. In reality however, rural school teacher training was not being reformed and the teachers were no better equipped to deal with isolated teaching than they had been in the early 1920s. Second, a brief synopsis of the teaching conditions in remote communities in the latter half of the decade will show that teaching in an isolated one-room school remained demanding and difficult. The administrators continued to be largely oblivious to the seriousness of the remote teachers' plight. In essence, between 1925-1930 neither rural-minded teachers nor the educational land of milk and honey as portrayed by inspectors existed.

As delineated in the preceding chapter, the Putman-Weir Report of May 1925 encapsulated and brought to the fore the problems associated with remote schools. It recommended that the quality of teaching be improved to reverse this academic underachievement in the isolated schoolhouse and in so doing hopefully effect basic social

and economic change through more efficient rural educational service.<sup>17</sup> As discussed previously, the Putman-Weir Report advocated a programme whereby rural-minded teachers would be created. Among other recommendations normal school curriculum was to be revised to include rural sociology and nature study, both of which would help the teacher better understand--in theory--rural conditions. Also the student teacher was to be trained in the theory and practice of tests and measurements so that she could gauge the progress of individual pupils and adjust her lesson timetable accordingly. The Putman-Weir Report suggested practise teaching in isolated schools as part of normal school training, as well as a system of reports designed to warn the teacher of conditions she might expect to find in remote communities. Salaries should be commensurate with successful teaching and community conditions, and "an adequate system of supervision" of young teachers should be implemented.<sup>18</sup> If these recommendations were executed, the Putman-Weir Report believed, rural schools would undoubtedly improve.

The basis of the programme for creating rural-minded teachers was to equip remote teachers emotionally and intellectually by improving their training in normal school. To this end the inspectors were delighted in the years immediately following the Putman-Weir Report's publication. Their observations indicated that the teachers between 1925-1930 were more qualified and happier as they stayed longer in each school. A "steadily improving" attitude of the teachers who were "deeply interested" in their work, "eager to improve their methods and technique," of excellent spirit and zeal, and whose "character of teaching...high [in] quality" proliferated throughout the

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<sup>17</sup>See the Putman-Weir Report, pp. 132-135, 150-151, 174-195, and 252-256. Refer to the Introduction for a discussion of the improvement of the one-room school based on the philosophy of rural moral and physical regeneration espoused by educational administrators as early as 1910.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 194-195.

countryside.<sup>19</sup> Greater efficiency and academic progress were recorded, attributed by some inspectors to decreased teacher transiency.<sup>20</sup> S.J. Willis of the Prince Rupert Inspectorate reported:

We are particularly free of those who have outlived their usefulness...; the majority are young men and women anxious to make good in the educational world, and willing to remain for a second or third year in the same school in order to prove themselves. Even my most remote schools are now able to hold their teachers for a reasonable period. Five years ago there were more changes at Christmas than there are now at the end of June.

To the better attendance of pupils, the higher training of teachers, and the greater stability of the teaching staff are due, in large measure, the better results of the examinations.<sup>21</sup>

The inspectors believed that better formal training was responsible for the improvement in teachers. The normal school seemed to be producing better graduates.

Inspector E.G. Daniels wrote:

The increasingly satisfactory professional attitude of a majority of teachers makes one very hopeful for the future. The growing efficiency of our normal schools, resulting in better-equipped graduates, should be a cause for grave concern to the few teachers who feel that there is nothing left for them to learn.<sup>22</sup>

In 1928 H.H. Mackenzie asserted that:

Most important of all, the general average of the teaching is steadily improving. The Fraser Valley is producing a fine body of teachers, both young men and young women, and I am persuaded that the acid test of the quality of the training received in British Columbia schools is the ever-increasing teaching ability as well as the splendid, wholesome character displayed by the young teachers in our rural schools who are the product of our own

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<sup>19</sup>In addition to the earlier references to teacher commendations in the Annual Reports, see especially 1926, p. R37; 1928, p. V31; and 1929, pp. R11, 30, 33.

<sup>20</sup>See especially ibid., 1926, pp. R32, 36, 38, 40; 1927, p. M41; 1928, p. V27; and 1929, p. R28.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 1926, p. R41.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V26.

elementary, secondary, professional, and higher institutions of learning.<sup>23</sup>

Joshua Hinchliffe, the Minister of Education, took time to point out in 1929 that teacher qualifications were "gradually strengthening" implying that the normal schools were doing good work.<sup>24</sup> The inspectors noted frequently that the summer school, a division of the Victoria normal school, was being attended by an increasing number of teachers who wanted to better their qualifications and understanding for rural teaching.

P.H. Sheffield of the Nelson Inspectorate remarked:

Throughout the inspectorate the teachers are manifesting a keen interest in their work and in all opportunities for improving their professional efficiency....The number of teachers from this district who attend...Summer Schools increases from year to year. This commendable attitude on the part of the teachers can only result in increased effectiveness of the class-room instruction.<sup>25</sup>

Kamloops Inspector A.F. Matthews avowed that:

In general the teachers have manifested a keen interest in their work throughout the year. Many of them are so eager to increase their professional efficiency that they are giving a large portion of each summer holiday to an attendance at the sessions of the Provincial Summer School...<sup>26</sup>

In addition, the teachers' growing interest in attending Teachers' Conventions and community meetings was cited as an indication of greater teacher awareness and enthusiasm for her rural profession.<sup>27</sup>

The inspectors believed that rural-minded teachers were in fact being created. The normal schools appeared to be training teachers successfully in the art of rural school

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V24.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 1929, p. R11.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1927, p. M39.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V27. The reports which linked increased teacher qualifications to summer school training are numerous. See especially 1926, pp. R32, 36; 1927, p. M14; 1928, pp. V25, 30, 31; and 1929, p. R31.

<sup>27</sup>See especially *ibid.*, 1927, pp. M32, 37; and 1928, p. V22.

teaching. The evidence was there: better teachers' qualifications, better teaching, less transiency, and more enthusiasm. The inspectors were wrong, however, on several counts. First, the Putman-Weir Report's recommendations for normal school reform of remote school teacher training were either sluggishly considered or merely ignored. The policy of creating rural-minded teachers never got off the ground. Of a total 23 courses included in the Victoria normal school curriculum in 1927, for example, only one, nature study, dealt with a rural subject.<sup>28</sup> Rural sociology was not offered. For the teachers enrolled in Vancouver normal school, practise teaching in a one-room school was restricted to one week if at all. As well, practise teaching schools were located in communities such as Burnaby, Richmond, North Vancouver, Delta, and Surrey--hardly isolated enough for the teacher to experience true conditions of remote teaching. Even a brief session in a coastal school (of which student teachers' attendance figures are unavailable) would not expose the teacher to the pedagogical problems associated with community impoverishment, transiency, and local politics. Moreover, throughout the latter half of the decade both normal schools complained of problems which worked against the success of an efficient one-room school practise teaching programme, in particular the lack of adequate facilities.<sup>29</sup>

The summer school in Victoria was not as well attended as the inspectors believed. Despite their argument that better summer school attendance demonstrated the zeal of an increasingly qualified teachers corps, in reality few remote school teachers attended, partially because of its prohibitive tuition fees. At most 15 percent of all rural and assisted school teachers attended annually between 1925-1930--as low as 9 percent in

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 1927, p. M50, and 1929, p. R43. In 1928, 24 courses were offered; in 1929, 26 courses. See 1928, p. V47, and 1929, p. R43. The curriculum for the Vancouver normal school is unavailable for these years.

<sup>29</sup>See especially ibid., 1926, pp. R51-52; 1927, pp. M50-52; and 1929, p. R43.

1927 with a marked decrease in 1930.<sup>30</sup> Of the total 1,939 teachers who attended summer school during these five years (558 of whom were rural and assisted teachers), the total enrolment in all courses which pertained to rural living was 59. In 1926 only 6 students sat in on rural science before the course was cancelled the following year; 6 teachers studied social science which incorporated rural sociology, in 1927: the course was dropped in 1928; and a high of 22 teachers attended nature study class in 1927, a course no longer offered by 1930.<sup>31</sup> Essentially in the five years a total of only 5 rural-related courses were offered in summer school while in any one year at least 14 other subjects were available in the curriculum.<sup>32</sup> Thus, not only was the vast majority of one-room school teachers not attending summer school but the few who did shunned the courses which may have helped them better cope with rural contingencies.

As with normal school reform other recommendations of the Putman-Weir Report were largely neglected. While the salary structure for assisted school teachers remained the same--they were still underpaid compared to rural and city school teachers<sup>33</sup>--the supervision of the teachers actually got worse. The inspectors were hampered constantly by inclement weather and poor transportation networks<sup>34</sup> and their brief visit to each school was occupied with administering standardized intelligence and achievement tests. Mrs. Manning remembered how little the inspectors cared for her welfare<sup>35</sup> and Miss M.J. Lynes in Crawford Creek northeast of Nelson responded to the

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<sup>30</sup>Indeed, a high of only 15 percent of all teachers in the province attended during these years.

<sup>31</sup>The average attendance of rural and assisted school teachers for each year between 1925-1930 was 112 as opposed to 388 average total enrolment of all school teachers per year. It is important to note that the one-room school teacher enrolment in summer school and attendance in the various rural courses were smaller than the figures given for rural and assisted schoolteachers.

<sup>32</sup>All statistics were drawn from the Annual Reports.

<sup>33</sup>See Chapter I for a brief discussion of assisted school teacher salaries.

<sup>34</sup>For example, see Annual Report 1928, p. V28; and 1927, p. M31, where the time consumed waiting for the boats "as the only means of conveyance in certain parts of [my] district...[was] altogether out of proportion to the number of schools to be visited."

<sup>35</sup>Interview, 1987.

inquiry for information from the Teachers' Bureau with a resentful "This is the first request I have received." Miss Lynes may have been bitter considering the oft-reported aloof attitude many inspectors displayed towards the young schoolteacher.<sup>36</sup>

An indication to the inspectors that the teachers were trying to upgrade their knowledge and expertise was increased attendance at Teachers' Conventions. Held annually around Easter in a centrally-located community, the Convention acted as a "medium for interchange of ideas; it is a sort of clearing house for teachers' problems, and a source of information..."<sup>37</sup> A safe inference can be made, however, that few remote teachers attended these conventions. The conventions were held only in some districts and were inaccessible to many one-room school teachers who, because of their isolation, found that even collecting the weekly mail from a town a few miles away was a harrowing and labourious chore.<sup>38</sup>

Although the inspectors were wrong about normal school effectiveness in creating rural-minded teachers and about signs of increased teacher conscientiousness, they accurately reported an improvement in teachers' qualifications.<sup>39</sup> Between 1925-1930 progressively more rural and assisted school teachers had first-class certificates (35 percent of all rural and assisted teachers in 1930 versus 23 percent in 1925), fewer held second-class certificates (59 percent in 1930 to 64 percent in 1925) and third-class certificates (2 percent as opposed to 7 percent). Interestingly, fewer rural and assisted school teachers were attending university for an academic certificate as the 5 percent

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<sup>36</sup>Interview, Mrs. M. Embury, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., March 1986; Mrs. Lexie Lawrie, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 24 February 1986; Mrs. Manning, 1987; Miss Mary Pack, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 25 March 1986; and Mrs. G.A. Steele, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 11 April 1987.

<sup>37</sup>Annual Report, 1927, p. M37.

<sup>38</sup>Unfortunately, attendance figures for the various annual conventions are not available. None of the retired schoolteachers interviewed recalled attending a convention while employed as a teacher in a one-room school.

<sup>39</sup>See especially Annual Report 1926, p. R35; 1928, pp. V21, 31; and 1929, p. R11.

who were working towards a Bachelor's Degree in 1925 dropped to just over 3 percent in 1930.<sup>40</sup>

The inspectors attributed this improvement in teachers' qualifications to normal school effectiveness when in fact formal instruction had little to do with the increase in the preponderance of more educated graduates. Inspector Leslie J. Bruce was one of the few officials to recognize a larger force at work. "So many teachers are available," he wrote, "that School Boards now have the opportunity to obtain teachers who are likely to do at least fair work."<sup>41</sup> A.F. Matthews of the Kamloops Inspectorate noted in 1928 that the "supply of teachers in this Province is now somewhat greater than is the demand for their services."<sup>42</sup> J.D. MacLean, the Minister of Education in 1925 acknowledged the importance of market forces, especially their effect on teacher transiency.<sup>43</sup> In 1925 the Province observed that five hundred teachers were out of work and the normal schools were turning out teachers too quickly.<sup>44</sup> Additional evidence that the teachers' job market was constricting can be found in normal school enrolment. Between 1924-1926 attendance in both normal schools dropped from 661 to 335, and fluctuated between 339 and 375 up to 1930.<sup>45</sup> This widening discrepancy between teacher supply and demand made teaching jobs more competitive. Better qualifications were needed if the teacher hoped to secure future employment. Once employed she would be reluctant to relinquish her post considering the lack of alternative positions available.<sup>46</sup> The increase in teacher enthusiasm may have been somewhat superficial,

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<sup>40</sup>Changes in percentages for rural and assisted schoolteachers coincided roughly with the figures for other teacher classifications. All statistics were drawn from the Annual Reports tables.

<sup>41</sup>Annual Report, 1927, p. M34.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 1928, p. V26.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 1925, p. M11.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Education Newspaper Clippings, Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C., 1925.

<sup>45</sup>The statistics were drawn from the Annual Reports.

<sup>46</sup>The importance of teaching qualifications in helping to secure a teaching job was dependent

therefore, because an indication of indifference on the part of the teacher could contribute to a negative inspector's report, subsequent dismissal, and unemployment. In essence, the normal schools were not responsible for producing better graduates. Student teacher instruction was not improving, rather the students were compelled to earn a higher certificate than before. Significantly, this added education did not include rural-oriented subjects.

The most damning evidence to suggest that rural-minded teachers were not being created to teach in isolated communities and that the educational system was not progressing to new heights of pedagogical efficiency is contained in the 1928 set of the Bureau Records. Individual teacher reports from the late 1920s continued to document the adverse teaching conditions and utter frustration of working in a one-room school. The number of these schools between 1925-1930 hovered around 500, which represented at least 50 percent of all elementary schools and 20 percent of the province's school population. Within them 20 percent of all elementary school teachers were employed. As discussed in Chapter I, a fundamental flaw in the Putman-Weir Report's programme for creating rural-minded teachers and a fact largely overlooked by the inspectors was that the vast majority of one-room school teachers were young unmarried women--a demographic profile which could make work in the wilderness challenging. Of 500 one-room school teachers who responded in the 1928 Bureau Records, 51 percent noted that the community in which they worked subsisted on farming, 26 percent on lumber and logging, 8 percent mining, and the remaining communities on fishing, ranching, fruit growing, trapping, tie-making, railroad work, resorts, hydro-electric plants, and auto,

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<sup>46</sup>[continued] mostly upon community requirements as perceived by the local school board. Interestingly, in 1926 Mrs. Margaret Manning (née Lanyon) landed her job in Black Canyon remote school in competition with a "shoebox full of 150 applicants" because she included a covering letter which described her father's recent industrial accident. Mrs. Manning is convinced that it was the sympathy expressed by the local school board for this event which assured her the teaching position. (Interview, Mrs. Manning, 1987).

brick, and cannery factories. The teachers classified the conditions of a substantial number of these communities "fair" or "poor" (40 percent), and the climate in some of these communities was severe: seven feet of snow and -50 degrees F, in others rainy and 104 degrees F. Similar to the conditions found in the 1923 Bureau Records, the terrain was as inhospitable as it was diverse: "swampy," "mountainous," "wooded," "open prairie," and "boggy lakes" were described with such adjectives as "rugged," "wild," "uncultivated," "rough," "desert-like," "barren," and "desolate." Common to all these communities was their isolation.

Similar to the 1923 set, the 1928 Bureau Records shows that each young teacher perceived her plight differently. One teacher complained of travelling two miles to school each morning while another lived "only" four miles from work; Miss S.J.A. Laughton in Parson near Golden wrote that community conditions were fairly good while she described the houses as very poor and miserably cold in the winter. And Robert McGowan in Burns Lake west of Vanderhoof recorded that the schoolhouse was in very good condition despite an accompanying picture which showed a delapidated log schoolhouse. A brief synopsis of the conditions to which the teacher had to adapt will form an overview of the demands required of teaching in an isolated community. Here the teacher's ordeal changed little from the experiences related only a few years earlier.

Often the ill-prepared teacher was immersed in a community unsure of itself or its future. Impoverishment continued to riddle many districts. Several communities were primitive. They were dirty, composed of shacks or log houses, even houses on floats, and had no modern conveniences.<sup>47</sup> Settlements were dependent on the prosperity of the local industry. From south of Greenwood in the southernmost part of the province, Miss

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<sup>47</sup> The 1928 Bureau Records contained many such depictions. For example, see reports from Castle Rock, Dawson Creek, Fraser Flats, Kelly Lake, and Morrissey Mines.

Margaret Albion wrote that "Boundary Falls used to be a fair-sized mining town with a smelter. Now there are many old, deserted buildings, a post office and flag station. A few remaining families have ranches; some of them find it quite a struggle to make a living." Into the latter half of the 1920s communities existed which were temporary in nature as families moved out in search of better prospects when the timber became exhausted, mines stripped, or soil unproductive.<sup>48</sup>

Teachers' accommodation was diverse. Living quarters were found in a farmhouse, ranchhouse, old school, teacherage attached to the school, hotel, post office, railroad station or section house, cookshack, remodelled warehouse, or hospital. In some communities teacher accommodation did not exist at all<sup>49</sup> while in several others it was squalid. Inhabitants supplied only the bare minimum at distances of up to sixteen miles from the nearest road, railroad, or boat landing. Mrs. D.M. Todhunter in "desolate" Seaford on the east coast of Cortes Island had a small unfurnished teacherage on the school grounds with no supplies. Miss A.L. Vye in Divide on Saltspring Island remarked that "Boarding facilities are very bad indeed. The nearest house is a mile from school and the family very unclean. The next place is 3 1/2 miles from school over an impassable road." Miss Abigail Nicholson in Kildonan west of Port Alberni on Vancouver Island complained:

Only a small lean adjoining school room, partly furnished 8 ft. by 18 ft. for teacher to live and board herself, which is very unsatisfactory because school is used for church, dance hall etc. & teacher has to put up with many disagreeable annoyances many times....A two-roomed cottage should be built for teacher, which will be more sanitary. At present I have to eat, sleep, cook, dry clothes etc. in just this little room, which is by no means healthy,

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<sup>48</sup>For transient communities, see reports especially from Big Lake, Blind Channel, Fish Lake Road, Hilltop, and Myrte Point.

<sup>49</sup>For example see *ibid.*, Miss E.M. Wallace in Champion Creek; Miss E. Frey in Cokato; H.H. Taylor in Galiano North; Miss C. Bertrand in Masset; and M.C. Simmons in Pouce Coupe Central.

not very much sunlight as it is behind school...

Miss Nicholson concluded her report with the belief that "the School Board seems to think the teacher doesn't need a livable dwelling like any human being should have....I do not intend to stay here after this term owing to these conditions."<sup>50</sup>

Frequently, the schoolhouse was in the same lamentable condition as the teacher's accommodation. In the 1928 Bureau Records 40 percent labelled the school in "fair" or "poor" condition. Similar to the 1923 reports, the school could be found in such buildings as a cottage, log cabin, shack, old ranch-house, church, store, room at a section house, community hall, or upstairs in a residence. Several schools were unhealthy, poorly heated and lit, and lacked adequate equipment and supplies. The grounds were small, rugged, and unfenced. In Vavenby about seventy miles north of Kamloops, the "rather primitive" school proved to be too fragile in the face of the elements when it and the surrounding woods were completely devastated by a violent windstorm.<sup>51</sup>

Community impoverishment had a deleterious effect on school attendance. In some instances families were too embarrassed to send their children to school or kept them home as extra help on the farm.<sup>52</sup> Occasionally poor transportation facilities coupled with harsh weather conditions made the school inaccessible to some pupils. A typical isolated community settlement pattern as delineated by Miss K. Wenmoth in Okeover Arm by Powell River was "...rather unsettled. 4 families along a heavily wooded trail 3 miles long." Heavy snow or rain would make such a trail dangerous if not impossible to

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<sup>50</sup>The Bureau Records are filled with descriptions of the poor state of teacher accommodation. For example, see Miss Mary Mitchell in Chu Chua, Miss Rhonda Chattell in Fort St. John, Miss C.E. Gilpin in St. Vincent Bay, and James C. Long in Willow River.

<sup>51</sup>Next to the teachers' accommodation, school facilities were given the most attention in both the 1923 and 1928 Bureau Records. For good examples of poor teaching facilities see the 1928 reports from Carroll's Landing; Croydon where the school was "useful, not beautiful"; Deroche; Ewing's Landing; Gray Creek; Newlands; and Sirdar where the school was small and the grounds a "disgrace."

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.: Jaffray, Port Renfrew, and Vinsulla.

traverse. In the communities poor conditions bred disease. A bout of whooping cough, scarlett fever, or infantile paralysis closed the school for indefinite periods of time.<sup>53</sup> Also, school attendance was subject to community transiency. Projected attendance rates were impossible to calculate. Teachers would chart religiously the number of families in the district, always watchful for signs of restlessness or impending departure.<sup>54</sup>

Compounding the problem of coping with a poor and roving school population was the ethnic composition of the community. In her timetable the teacher not only had to juggle children of various ages, capabilities, and achievement, but she also had to accommodate children who knew no English and, especially in ethnically-homogeneous settlements, still clutching onto their native customs. Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Russian, Ukrainian, Czechoslovakian, Polish, Austrian, German, Dutch, Italian, Swiss, Slavic, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, French, Indian, and half-breed children attended school.<sup>55</sup> At times adults attended school to learn the language or basic mathematics. Throughout the isolated communities "heavy" schools--those which were difficult to organize because of the pupil composition--proliferated. To many teachers the fluctuating and diverse nature of the pupil population was an administrative nightmare.<sup>56</sup>

By far the most aggravating and distressing condition the one-room school teacher had to confront and the one which inevitably drew the administrators' attention to the predicament of the teacher was the nature of community politics. Young, alone, lonely, and dominated by the whims of her landlord (according to the 1928 Bureau Records, 59

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<sup>53</sup> At Telegraph Creek, the nearest doctor was two hundred miles away. Also see reports from Cultus Lake, Quick, and Willow River.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid. See especially Gladwin, Kincolith, Cranberry, Marsh, and Canford.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. See especially Carson, Glade, and Outlook.

<sup>56</sup>For examples of "heavy" schools, see reports from Albreda, Deroche, Shirley, and Fraser Flats.

percent of the teachers boarded), unpredictable school board demands, and inter-family jealousies, the teacher was thrust into another career, a diplomat, lest she be wrung through the local rumour mill and ostracized. In the Bureau Records teachers reiterated the need to remain tactful, canny, and impartial in all community squabbles. In Marten Lake east of Fort Fraser, R.T. Pollack observed that the "People seem to [be] at loggerheads with each other. Uncomfortable for a teacher with thin skin." Religious cliques were distinct in Kaleden, Pender Harbour was "the worst for scandal," and Miss Marion V. Sleighton in Mud River southwest of Prince George warned that "It would not be a wise policy to send an inexperienced teacher here, for the community does not have much co-operative spirit or harmony so it makes a teacher tread most carefully to keep on friendly terms with all." Residents quarrelled incessantly in Salmon River (also near Prince George), and on Thetis Island, O.A. Barry suggested that the teacher must get to know the chief people in the district for her stay to be pleasant. Miss Sadie J. Johnston who taught in West Demars on Slocan Lake in 1928 recalled:

I experienced some small town jealousies there, so that if I was friendly with one family another would reject me. When I mentioned this to the Inspector he suggested I stay neutral and not patronize one family above another. This was not easy to do because the "hostile" family never did invite me to their home, explaining they couldn't as the husband had diabetes. There were only three families in the school....I felt the small town jealousies hard to deal with, so decided to try for new position.<sup>57</sup>

The teacher's boarding situation complicated any strategy of neutrality. Although in some communities the families refused to board the teacher,<sup>58</sup> the extra income and help around the house were irresistible inducements to offer the teacher a room. This caused further strife in a sometimes divided community when families argued over who

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<sup>57</sup>Letter, Mrs. Sadie J. Stromgren, retired schoolteacher, New Westminster, B.C., April 1986.

<sup>58</sup>For example, see Bureau Records, Prairie, Bouchie Lake, Endako, Palling, and Stevenson.

deserved to house the paying guest. Mrs. Annie Abercrombie summarized the situation of many one-room school teachers when she warned that to keep the peace in her community, Three Valley west of Revelstoke, "it is advisable for a teacher to board herself."

Similar to the situation found in many remote areas in the early 1920s, community members were at times parsimonious and obstinate. In several settlements the school board prohibited teachers from boarding outside the district because of the money brought in through rent.<sup>59</sup> From Pine near Merritt, Miss Mabel Nelson wrote that the "Boarding Place predominating idea "How much will you pay for it?" 1st term--It couldn't be better. 2nd term-Everyone trys (sic) to govern the teacher." Frederick Job referred to Burtondale on the northeast end of Lower Arrow Lake as "...probably the most backward school in B.C. The district is exceedingly loath to spend money for school purposes....Their sole idea is to get a teacher & pay the minimum salary possible. Motto of the community "Keep down the taxes." Stingy community members could be uncooperative. From just north of Vanderhoof, Miss Dorothy Baxter mentioned that "Chilco would be a very nice district to teach in if it were not for two families who are always ready to make trouble for every teacher" and Miss Belle McGauley in Ashton Creek five miles east of Enderby sensed a "continual feeling of ~~animosity~~ opposition in the air."<sup>60</sup>

Although neglectful, the inspectors and administrators were never totally oblivious to the hardship of teaching in a one-room school. In the 1928 Bureau Records the

<sup>59</sup>Ibid. See especially Miss L. Hayes in Salmon Valley. In one area, the teacher was fired explicitly for taking up residence outside the community. (Interview, Mrs. Manning, 1986).

<sup>60</sup>See also Bureau Records for Brisco, where "a better feeling among inhabitants" was needed; the people of North Cedar needed "tactful handling"; the settlers in West Creston did not want the school to open; one family made teaching undesirable in Curzon; the sparsely settled Meadow Valley families were simply "unsociable"; Proctor society was divided into two factions; and Tatalrose, where a "lack of co-operation on the part of the parents in school undertakings" was evident.

inspectors found nine "men's schools" which denoted that the district, because of its rugged conditions and predominance of anxious bachelors, was too dangerous for a young inexperienced woman teacher.<sup>61</sup> The inspectors' individual school reports (apart from the reports found in the Annual Reports) occasionally described conditions which militated against successful one-room school pedagogy.<sup>62</sup> A case for prescience was made in 1927 when A.C. Stewart of a Victoria Inspectorate devoted an inordinate amount of attention to encouraging the isolated teacher in the face of community pressure.

In all other lines of human activity it is the general opinion that more allowance is made for the young and inexperienced than in the teaching profession. This is, I think, generally true, especially in the rural districts. We all have the same burden of human defects and need all the helpfulness, sympathy, and encouragement possible from the community in which we serve in order that we may rise in some measure and in some degree to the height of the service required and demanded of us. Whatever the baffling conditions, whatever the adverse and apparently unjust criticism, if we honestly and sincerely try and strive we shall at least enjoy the luxury of self-respect. "Criticism," it has been wisely said, "is a study by which men grow important and formidable at a very small expense..."<sup>63</sup>

In this same district, one year later, a young woman teacher shot herself to death in her cabin ostensibly, according to her suicide note, because the trustees were unduly

<sup>61</sup>The men's schools" in the Bureau Records were Horne Lake, Maple Grove, Okanagan Falls, Pacific, Porteau, Skidegate, Telegraph Creek, Woodcock, and Sullivan Hill.

<sup>62</sup>Copies of the inspectors' individual school reports were given to the teacher, trustees, and Department officials. Available in the Provincial Archives in Victoria, they contain information on school sanitation, janitorial service, desks, maps, blackboards, building and grounds, availability and quality of water, character of teaching, school management and control, grading and standing of pupils, and teacher attitude. All the reports used in this chapter were from the 1927-1928 school year. In the Archives they are listed alphabetically. See especially reports from Alice Siding, where satisfactory progress was hindered by poor students; Beaver River where school conditions could be improved: "(1) Grounds fenced & otherwise improved (2) Woodshed built (3) An adequate supply of water provided for (4) Flag pole erected [(5)] Desk Fastened [(6)] Bookcase provided. School building chinked"; Blucher Hall; Blueberry Creek where attendance was irregular due to illness and family problems; Boston Bar where the "pupils are all very backward for which Miss Hand is not responsible"; Bridesville, Chinook Lane; Clearwater; Cokato where "Present teacher found classes in very backward conditions"; and Concord where "These pupils are backward...The toilets are in a very unsatisfactory state. Some disinfectant should be used & these outhouses should be kept clean." The inspectors' individual reports are used extensively in Chapters III and IV.

<sup>63</sup>Annual Report, 1927, p. M31.

critical of her work in the school. The event brought the struggle of remote school teachers to the public's attention. The Vancouver Province published her suicide note:

There are a few people who would like to see me out of the way so I am trying to please them....I know this is a coward's way of doing things, but what they said about me almost broke my heart. They are not true.

Among the complaints levelled at Miss Mabel Jones by the Cowichan Lake School Board were lack of discipline in the classroom and her failure to lower the school flag at night. The Province included the rider to the coroner's jury verdict of temporary insanity which suggested an amendment to the School Act so that school affairs in "small, isolated school districts" be put in the hands of "competent trustees, not necessarily elected, thus freeing the teacher from the gossip of irresponsible and petty citizens."<sup>64</sup>

In the midst of the publicity concerning Jones' death<sup>65</sup> the Minister of Education acted promptly. With the support and confidence of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation,<sup>66</sup> Joshua Hinchliffe removed the Cowichan Lake School Board and appointed an official trustee in its place. He set forth several recommendations: a revision of rural school classification on the basis of quality of teaching conditions; an increase in the salaries of assisted school teachers as a means of reward for successful service; a system whereby provincial police would visit periodically the isolated teachers to check on their progress; and the appointment of a "Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer" whose duty was to "visit the rural districts of the province where the living and social conditions under which young female teachers are working are not found to be satisfactory." To the

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<sup>64</sup>Department of Education Newspaper Clippings, Provincial Archives, 21 November 1928.

<sup>65</sup>Public reaction was mixed. One editorial cried out for the reform of the teachers' supervisory system and local administration while another lauded the community-controlled school board as a bastion of democracy. See Newspaper Clippings, February 1929.

<sup>66</sup>The official stand of the BCTF was somewhat passive. It was unquestioningly favourable towards apparently adequate supervision of the schools and merely called for a consideration of transforming the local school boards into larger administrative units. See The B.C. Teacher: Official Organ of the B.C. Teachers' Federation VIII, no. 4 (December 1928): 4-6.

one-room school teacher the Welfare Officer was to act as a "friend and good counsellor who will ever be ready to respond to any call that may come for advice and assistance."<sup>67</sup> Finally, the administrators seemed to be showing concern proportionate to the seriousness of teaching in an isolated community.

This was not to be the case. The inspectors remained silent on the entire issue and the death of Mabel Jones faded rapidly from public and administrative attention. An official investigation was undertaken by the Department of Education into Jones' death, but as a result Hinchliffe's only recommendation to be acted upon was the employment of Lottie Bowron as the Teachers' Welfare Officer. Although a step in the right direction, her appointment was a kneejerk response to Jones' death, a belated, almost flippant concession to the gravity of the isolated teachers' situation. Ultimately Bowron's appointment was inadequate to deal with the problem. Because travel was difficult in some areas which made many schools inaccessible, in 1929 and 1930 she visited less than half of all rural and assisted schools in the province thus leaving most remote teachers to fend for themselves. Her own recommendation that only men or married women be sent to rural districts had no impact as into the 1930s the vast majority of remote school teachers remained young, female, and single. Only her part as guest lecturer in the normal schools where she warned the students of the social and economic conditions of remote communities had any hope for real success.<sup>68</sup>

The question remains as to the apathy expressed by the administrators and inspectors towards the problems of one-room school teaching. No evidence existed to prove that the remote schools were improving. In fact, of 56 individual inspector's reports from 1928 randomly consulted, 13 included a lack of progress among the

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<sup>67</sup> Annual Report, 1929, p. R10.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., see 1929, p. 34; and 1930, p. Q32.

students or outright retardation. Certainly in some schools the teaching conditions were no better than they had been between 1920-1925 and in some transient communities the general conditions quite possibly had deteriorated. Why the Department of Education chose to neglect remote schools after 1925 demands a larger study into its administrative machinery and hierarchy during this time but speculation here into the possible reasons may be instructive.

First, the administrators were getting the wrong impression of remote conditions. The Bureau Records were distributed by a branch of the Department of Education, the Teachers' Bureau, primarily to assist local school boards in securing appropriate teachers and to acquaint teachers with desirable schools. The educational policy-makers may never have consulted these forms. 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. They would not have had the time or conviction to explore local problems.

As well, as discussed in Chapter I, the inspectors' reports tended to be overly positive. Promotion out of the field where in some cases thousands of miles of rugged terrain had to be traversed each year must have appeared very attractive to the inspectors. 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. Moreover, at this time of scrutiny mainly from the Putman-Weir Report, the inspectors lauded the efforts of the normal schools for producing better graduates, a favourable impression which must have sat well with friends and colleagues in Victoria and Vancouver who were upset with the criticism

levelled at them by Putman and Weir.<sup>69</sup>

Third, to the administrators no news was good news. The lack of adequate research into the stress of teaching in remote districts could have caused them to suspect that the teaching conditions in the isolated communities were being improved. Automatically the administrators assumed that any problem was dealt with successfully through such remedial measures as correspondence schools, experimental consolidation, and Lottie Bowron. Most remote school teachers had no effective outlet for their grievances; thus the Department of Education remained ignorant of their plight.

In relation to this, the administrators may have been blinded by progress in other areas of the educational system. During the late 1920s school facilities and educational opportunity were expanding. New urban schools were built, student population was increasing and attendance levels were rising, high schools and superior schools in the larger rural areas were established, and a proportionate increase in expenses was being budgeted. The bureaucracy expanded as problems of growth were tackled and unarticulated conditions of stagnation or decay were easily ignored.

As remote school teaching was as difficult or became even more strenuous throughout the 1920s, the administrators seemed to remain unconcerned. An overview of the entire decade reveals that they had little idea of the hardship and frustration experienced by thousands of isolated teachers. Evidence of the Department of Education's misunderstanding of the problem is abundant but nowhere is it clearer than the administrators' misguided belief in the efficacy of what they considered the production of

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<sup>69</sup>See John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools," in *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History*, eds. Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), pp. 75-97, for a look at the impact of Putman and Weir's recommendations which "stunned not a few." (p. 87).

better-equipped teachers, as well as the continued intractable conditions of teaching in a remote community. Well into the 1930s, within these small pockets of civilization throughout British Columbia, schools remained inefficient and teachers continued to struggle.

Part II: The Schools in the British Columbia North-Central Interior:

Terrace to Vanderhoof

### Chapter III: Settlement and Schools

*"Talking of schools, one must speak of the great asset to the community of the young school-marms of those days. Most of them were quite young and entered whole heartedly into the life of the district. We had often remarked on the fact that in stories written about early days of settlement the young school marm was usually in the role of heroine, or at least of leading lady. In actual experience it was not difficult to learn the reason, for, very often, she was the only eligible lady among a flock of bachelors. Some of these school marms stayed in the country as settler's wives, and I don't think they have regretted the step, and they have certainly made good wives."*<sup>1</sup>

*"2 months and 1 week left"*<sup>2</sup>

#### Overview

The above quotes indicate two very different realities of rural school teaching. Implied in the second quote and discussed at length in Part I, young, single women were often faced with general hardship, frustration, and loneliness when teaching in the dire 1920s conditions of northern British Columbia communities. In 1927 Mildred McQuillan, teacher of Orange Valley School near Fort Fraser, late for school one day, "crawl[ed] out [of bed] at 8:30--get to school at 9:15 exactly--don't give a darn either--life is bitter!" Why teachers did not enjoy their jobs under remote school circumstances is easy to understand, and the rate of teacher transiency in these schools supplies the numerical evidence.

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Shelford, "Reminiscences," revised and enlarged edition, 1968, p. 23, Provincial Archives, Victoria BC.

<sup>2</sup>Mildred McQuillan, teacher of Orange Valley one-room school from September to December 1927, counting down the days to her departure. Mildred McQuillan's Diary, 1927, is repositied in the Provincial Archives in Victoria, British Columbia.

The other reality is more elusive. To what extent did remote school teachers find such challenging work enjoyable? Various diaries and reminiscences all tended to minimize the pleasurable side of one-room school teaching, and unfortunately, no statistics and little qualitative evidence exist to explore the issue of those teachers who, so liking the area, remained in the community after leaving the teaching profession. The Bureau Records only infrequently report positive remote teaching experiences. Yet some examples exist. In a rare outburst of enthusiasm from a teacher working in a one-room school, Miss J.E. Moodie in Ewing's Landing on the west side of Okanagan Lake wrote in 1928 "The happiest spot in B.C. for the right person!--My fourth year,--and they still cheer me on!" At times, working conditions were well-disposed. Miss Mary Dobson in Australian, just south of Quesnel, reported that "The people in this district are nearly all well-educated and very hospitable. They take a great interest in the school and a pride in keeping the school well supplied." People in Atlin, a far north mining town on the east side of Atlin Lake were "exceptionally kind and hospitable to teacher," and Miss Kathleen Holman in Killarney, south of remote Dease Lake in the Cassiar district wrote that the "school board very helpful. Parents co-operative. District friendly towards teacher. Children eager to come to school." Some communities provided very satisfactory accommodation and clean, well-built schools. For entertainment few schools could match Robson, a few miles north of Castlegar, where the community had a general store, post office, two tennis courts, a badminton and winter social club. In Roe Lake near Lillooet outdoor life meant "ample facilities for riding, fishing, skiing, skating, etc."

Other Bureau Records remarked on the health and cleanliness of local communities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The above references except for Australian and Atlin were taken from the 1928 Bureau Records. For generally favourable teaching conditions, see Bureau Records, 1923 especially for Dove Creek; Kaleden, where the people strove to make the teacher feel comfortable; Meldrum Creek, where a "good social time" is possible; Read Island which is ideal if "one is fond of wild and picturesque scenery, hiking and fishing"; Swan lake, and Stuart Station; and in 1928: Brisco; Cedarville, where the living conditions are "Good. People are clean and the children are

Despite these few claims in the Bureau Records that some remote schools provided agreeable working conditions for the seemingly complacent teacher, overwhelming evidence suggests that being employed in a British Columbia one-room school in the 1920s was demanding, labourious, and often frustrating when forced to adapt to pioneer conditions which tested personal character and will. Moreover, at times the conditions were extremely dangerous. The teachers in the remote schools were frequently faced with torrential rain, snow, or wind storms which would topple trees and shack houses, flood roads and foot paths, and make some communities inaccessible for days. Wild animals provided an additional hazard, as did some transient strangers of suspect intentions who would appear in the community for a few months and disappear just as mysteriously.

Most newly-settled areas in the province were characterized by comparable conditions but no clearer can such indiscriminate dangers be epitomized than when Miss Loretta A. Chisholme, 21 years old and teacher of the Port Essington Assisted School, ventured out from her boarding house on a Sunday morning in May 1926 for her customary walk before church. She never returned. The body of a teacher of "ability and high character" who taught in several one-room schools in the northern interior was found the following day in a bush near a walking path, her chest and the back of her head crushed, jaw and nose broken, and moss forced down her throat, probably to stifle her screams. The autopsy revealed that she suffocated to death. An Indian was indicted then later acquitted for lack of evidence as the jury declared that "the deceased came to her death as a result of foul play on the part of some person or persons unknown." In this extreme example the danger of teaching in a northern remote school in the 1920s became

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<sup>3</sup>[continued] well nourished and healthy"; Chimney Creek which had "kind-hearted" and hospitable families; Cobble Hill, Elko, and Meadow Creek.

patently obvious.<sup>4</sup>

So far the look at rural school teaching has been in generalizations, the over-all picture of working in a small, one-room school in the 1920s. Ultimately, this perspective is incomplete, especially when considering the problem faced by educational administrators at the time. As seen particularly in the Annual Reports, the Department of Education was either unaware of or neglected the importance of the vast differences among rural communities. The physical conditions of the communities, both natural and man-made, as well as informal politics (local social interaction) and local economic activity made rural British Columbia resemble a hodge-podge of settlement, a checkerboard of small enclaves of population each unique to itself. Each remote community in which a one-room school was located was a microcosm of affairs, isolated from other groups of people by weather and rugged terrain.

Individual communities presented their own impediments to school efficiency. For example, personal interests varied from one community to another, and neither the inspector nor the teacher often knew what to expect in regards to local support for the school. In addition, reform of the financially and pedagogically inefficient rural school was difficult due to community isolation, transiency and impoverishment. Astutely, but in frustration, the Putman-Weir Report noted that

British Columbia must attain a much higher stage in her social evolution....Many handicaps, both economic and social, incident to rural life, will necessarily be experienced in the remote areas of the Province for a considerable number of years. The conditions of pioneer life in many of these areas are still in existence and

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<sup>4</sup>The case remains unsolved. For a full description of the murder and legal proceedings, see Prince Rupert Daily News, 27 May - 16 June, 22-25 November 1926, and for the appeal, the New Westminster Columbian, 7 April 1927. The official inquest manuscripts are unavailable. Even the Daily News commented on the hazards of the locality. "All kinds of characters" gathered in the village in the fishing season and despite several warnings about the questionable nature of some of the locals, Miss Chisholme persisted on taking her Sunday walks alone.

cannot be entirely overcome by any government, however paternal it may be.<sup>5</sup>

A closer look at individual schools is necessary. Keeping in mind the underlying relationship between the young school teacher and the frequently distressful teaching conditions, this chapter will introduce a specific region of study, namely the schools which existed in the years 1915-1930 roughly between Terrace and Vanderhoof along the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The chapter following will then focus on how a variety of factors such as local economic activity, settlement patterns, and local politics interacted with the teacher herself to provide difficulties for those seeking remote school pedagogical and financial reform. Moreover, a clearer picture of the conditions in which the one-room school teacher worked can be delineated to show how rural school teaching in British Columbia was a demanding and highly personal ordeal.

### Sources

Various source materials were used to piece together the 1920s history of one-room schools in the northern interior of the province. The inspectors' individual school reports allow for a close look into the actual pedagogy of each school. The inspectors rarely reported on aspects of rural teaching other than the quality of the teaching, school enrolment and attendance, and general conditions of the school building and equipment. The purpose of the reports was strictly administrative. By law, copies were distributed to the teacher, school board, and Department of Education officials in Victoria,<sup>6</sup> and they

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<sup>5</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup>British Columbia, Office of the Provincial Secretary, Revised Statutes of British Columbia, III, Victoria, chapter 226, section 7.

functioned as quality control whereby problems with teaching technique and schoolhouse atmosphere could be brought to the fore and corrected. For the region in question, Terrace to Vanderhoof, most schools were inspected twice a year, and these reports served as invaluable official comment on the teacher's professional progress.<sup>7</sup>

The Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer's reports add another dimension to the study of individual one-room schools. Lottie Bowron's perspective on the plight of the remote school teacher is somewhat refreshing. Here was an objective observer operating between 1929-1933, a trouble-shooter who travelled the northern hinterland seeking primarily not to criticize but to act as a counsellor in the event of teacher distress with living accommodation or personal differences with community members. Her reports sometimes show quite clearly the physical conditions in which the teacher lived and worked, and they give succinct renditions of local disputes which help explain that teaching success in a remote school was frequently contingent on the ability of the teacher to be canny and diplomatic.<sup>8</sup>

Various local histories which in varying degrees refer to schools in the area also help piece together an over-all picture of community life. They are at times unreliable,

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<sup>7</sup>These reports are available for the 1920s on several reels of microfilm in the Provincial Archives. (GR 122). They are listed alphabetically by school. Consult the Department of Education Finding Aid.

<sup>8</sup>Lottie Bowron's Reports are included in the inspectors' individual reports (GR 122) in the Provincial Archives. They span the years 1929-1933. Although Miss Bowron's reports are invaluable for historical study, they are sometimes frustratingly vague, on occasion merely stating that a serious problem had arisen between the teacher and the community and that it was subsequently resolved. For example, in 1932 from Kitwanga, a small village one hundred miles north of Terrace on the Skeena River, Bowron wrote simply that the teacher "has had a few difficulties." From Tintagel, a small farming and tie-making community six miles south of Burns Lake, she tantalizingly reported in 1929 that "This is a lonely place and in the past there have been tribulations in the school but conditions have improved." Also, at times Bowron described the difficulties inherent in trying to monitor a number of schools over a vast geographical area. Often teachers had to come *en masse* to a centrally-located place to meet Bowron. In one case Miss Helen Hibbert of Dorreen school (half way between Terrace and Kitwanga) met with Bowron as she was passing through. Bowron wrote "I had a very short visit with this teacher while the way freight was unloading freight." (Bowron Reports, October 1930). Currently, Dr. J.D. Wilson of the University of British Columbia is undertaking an in-depth study of Bowron.

however, because of their nostalgia and penchant for anecdotes, and many are written by well-intentioned amateur historians who tend to rely on memory rather than recorded document.<sup>9</sup> Other local histories are well compiled and better referenced.<sup>10</sup> In sum, along with the Bureau Records, the Putman-Weir Report, and assorted reminiscences collected through interviews and diaries, sources such as the inspectors' individual school reports, the Bowron Reports, and local histories all combine to afford a fairly comprehensive overview of teaching conditions in one-room schools.

Two other sources are noteworthy. First, the Department of Education's Annual Reports give a broad perspective of inspectorate affairs, while the statistical tables therein are indispensable for charting on a yearly basis the establishment of the schools in the region as well as each school's pupil enrolment, attendance, operating budget, and teacher transiency rate. Ultimately, the information derived from the tables can be used to reveal school conditions which in some cases were very distressful.

As "one of the largest activities of the Government both in the extent of the organization required for collecting data, and in the magnitude of the operations involved in compiling, analyzing and otherwise adapting these data to...public and private uses,"<sup>11</sup> the 1931 Canadian Census for an entire census district can be a wealth of information about, for example, demographic trends, unemployment, and community conditions such as building structures and service industries. As this study is confined to a subdistrict, the Census was valuable only as background information, particularly in relation to population composition and growth.

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<sup>9</sup>For a good example of this kind of wispy scholarship, see the Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C., Wiggs O'Neil, Sperry Cline, Gordon Robinson, and Stanley Rough, "Time and Place: Stories of Northern British Columbia," (no date).

<sup>10</sup> For an example of this dedicated form of local history, see R.G. Large, Skeena: River of Destiny (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, 1981).

<sup>11</sup>Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, I (Ottawa: 1936), p. 29.

## **Economic Activity from the Upper Skeena River to the Nechako Valley, 1900-1930**

The area of study is in the northwest centre of the province approximately 700 miles north of Vancouver. (See map 1). The 1931 Census designated this area as "subdistrict 8e, f, and g."<sup>12</sup> (See Map 2). The district is approximately 30,000 square miles<sup>13</sup> and about 300 miles long from north to south, and 120 miles wide at its base.

Until 1930 patches of settlement were located along a thin valley winding from Vanderhoof in the Nechako Valley, northwest through Smithers in the Bulkley Valley, north to Hazelton then south along the Skeena River to Terrace. This was a 350 mile strip of land approximately 15 miles wide on either side of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. As well, tiny communities were found in the low rolling marsh and farm lands of Francois and Ootsa Lakes south of Burns Lake, and in the northern outpost of Fort St. James, about fifty miles north of Vanderhoof. The remaining area, consisting of northern heavily-timbered mountainous wilderness as well as mountains and lakes of the south, remained unsettled other than the indigenous Athapaskan and Tsimishian Indian ethnic divisions, comprised of numerous scattered tribes.<sup>14</sup> This relatively small geographical area within the wide expanse of the interior of British Columbia by 1930 contained some sixty-seven schools.

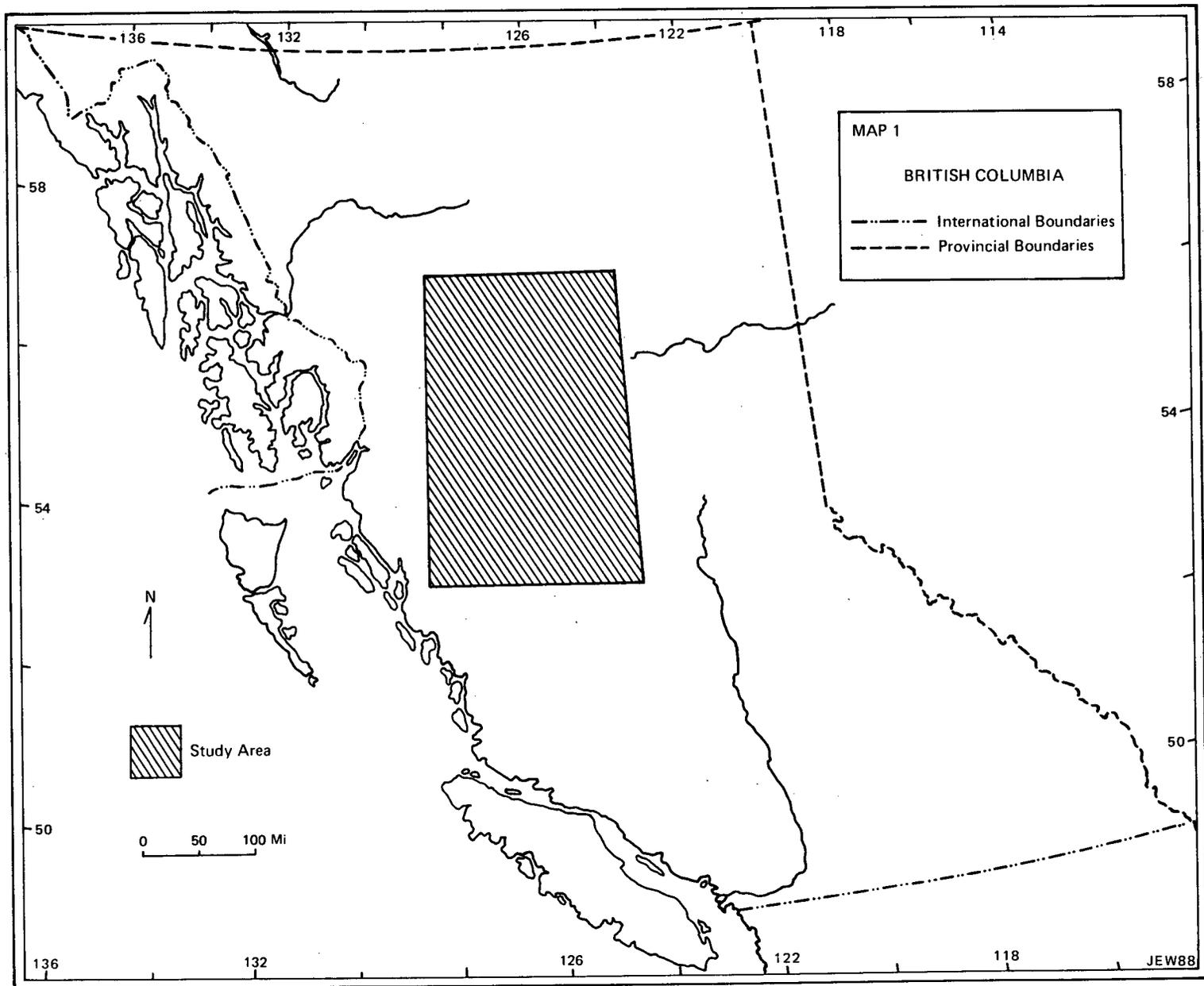
In 1908, the district had been considered by the Bureau of Provincial Information as

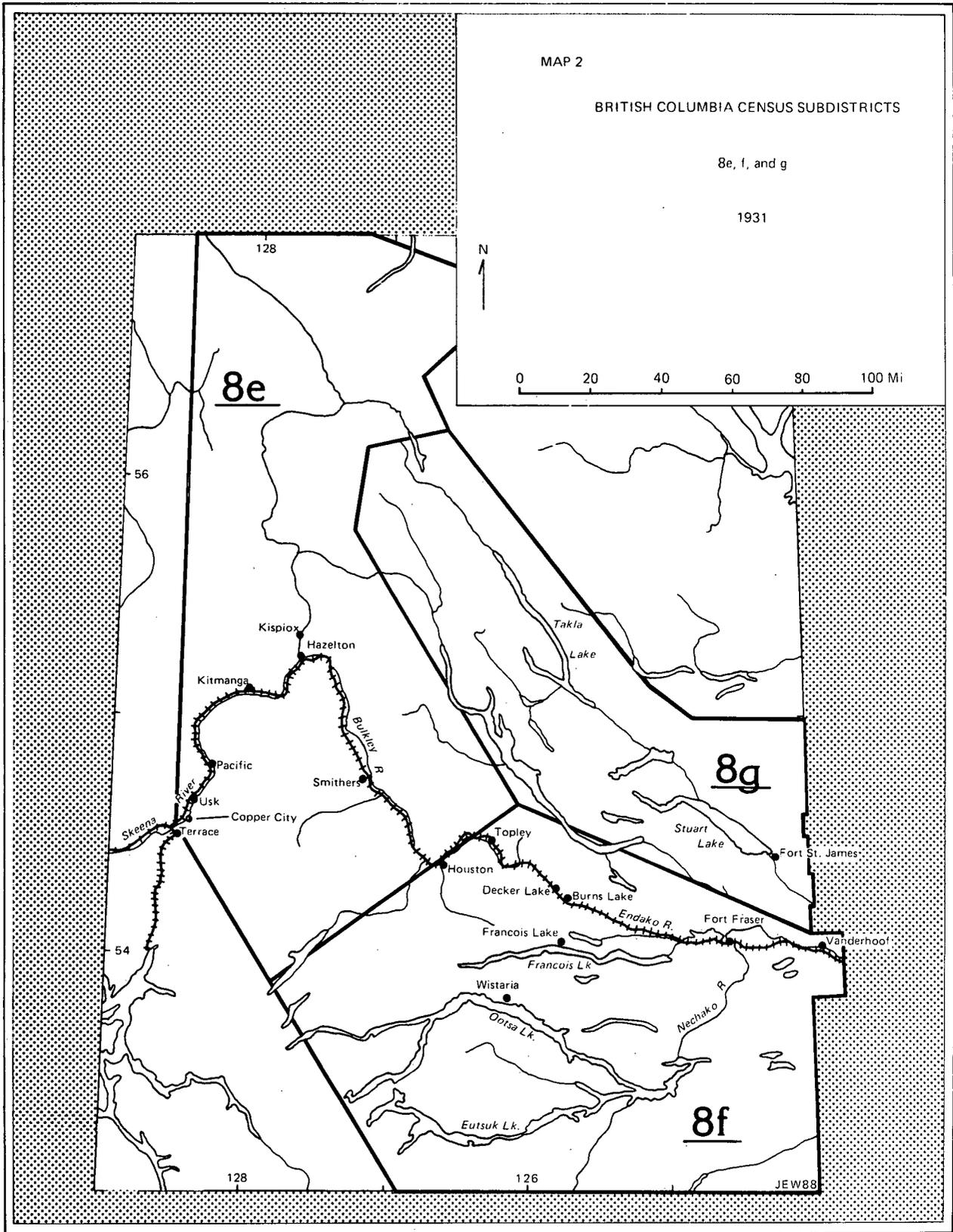
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<sup>12</sup>Unless otherwise stated these subdistricts will be referred to as a district, singular.

<sup>13</sup> Calculated from the figure given for all of District 8 which extends to the Alberta border as far north as MacKenzie and as far south as Williams Lake and Alexis Creek. See 1931 Census, II, pp. 5-6.

<sup>14</sup>See Wilson Duff, The Impact of the White Man, Anthropology in British Columbia Memoir, 1, no. 5 (Victoria: Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology, 1964), for an extensive study of the Indian ethnic divisions and tribes in British Columbia.





a "great unknown region."<sup>15</sup> In the west, few pack trails crossed the landscape prior to white man's first major penetration along the Skeena River and east into the Nechako Valley in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1866 surveyors from the Collins Overland Telegraph Company pushed up the Skeena through to Hazelton in an ambitious effort to establish a communication link between Europe and North America through Alaska and Russia. When the work was abandoned fifteen miles north of Hazelton the same year that the Atlantic telegraph cable was laid, most of the line locators who were hired to stake out the trail vacated the Upper Skeena and a few lone prospectors remained behind. Apart from the missionaries who lived in the Indian villages around the Kitwanga-Hazelton area and the early Hudson's Bay explorers who searched for suitable trading post sites,<sup>16</sup> the Upper Skeena region remained wild and for the most part untouched until the twentieth century.

Prior to 1900, the eastern boundary of the district was only brushed by white man, when in the early 1800s the Hudson's Bay Company established trading posts in Fort St. James and along the Nechako River at Fort Fraser. The terrain was unyielding; the Stuart and Babine Lake area in the north was a vast expanse of forested and rugged mountainous country with few navigable rivers while the wilderness west of Fort Fraser was uncleared. This area between Vanderhoof and Hazelton remained largely unexplored until 1886 when surveyors were hired by the Dominion Government to link up Quesnel to Hazelton by telegraph, a feat eventually accomplished fifteen years later. Amid small and isolated Indian settlements, the Nechako and south Bulkley Valley, similar to the Upper Skeena region, experienced an explosion of population with the

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<sup>15</sup>Bureau of Provincial Information, "New British Columbia: The Undeveloped Areas of the Great Central and Northern Interior," Bulletin 22, edition 8, 1908.

<sup>16</sup>Hazelton was the lone trading post in the Upper Skeena River area.

coming of the G.T.P. in the early twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1900-1930 the development of the Upper Skeena and the push inward as far as Burns Lake from the west along with immigration from the east was greatly facilitated by the opening of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. Although the district between Terrace and north of Francois Lake was populated sporadically by lone prospectors, trappers, missionaries, and Indians, no major influx of people occurred until the first few years of the twentieth century when railway survey workers travelled perilously up the Skeena River by steamboat, then down the Bulkley River. Every convenient port in which they settled was later established as administrative centres, supply depots, and in the case of Pacific, Dorreen, Smithers, Telkwa, Quick, and Houston, railway construction camps. Transportation and communication networks grew--by 1915 Hazelton was receiving mail an unheard of twice a week<sup>18</sup>--as people steadily moved into the Skeena and Bulkley Valley regions from both the west and east. As an economic draw the railway became shortly thereafter somewhat of a white elephant, however, as its full potential was never met as a viable network to move western Canadian goods to Pacific ports. The G.T.P. was used only to move lumber to

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<sup>17</sup>Information on the history of the district before and after 1900 is contained in: John F. Appleton, "Nechako Valley," *Westward Ho! Magazine* II, no. 6 (June 1908): 79-82; Nan Bourgon, Rubber Boots for Dancing: And Other Memories of Pioneer Life in the Bulkley Valley (Smithers: Tona and Janet Heatherington, 1979); W.J. Clement, "Bulkley Valley," *Westward Ho! Magazine* II, no. 6 (June 1908): 75-78; Sperry Cline, Wiggs O'Neil, Mrs. E.N. Whitlow and Stan Rough, Along the Totem Trail: Port Essington to Hazelton (Kitimat: Northern Sentinal Press, 1961); Lynn Hancock, Vanderhoof: The Town that Wouldn't Wait (Vanderhoof: Nechako Valley Historical Society, 1979); N.J. Kerby, One Hundred Years of History--Terrace B.C. (Terrace: Terrace Regional Museum Society, 1984); Large, Skeena: River of Destiny, 1981; Jack Mould, Stumpfarms and Broadaxes (Saanichton: Hancock House, 1976); Province of British Columbia, Bureau of Provincial Information, Victoria, B.C., "New British Columbia," *Bulletin* 22, 1908; Province of British Columbia, Department of Lands, Land Recording Division, Victoria, B.C., *Bulletin* 30, 1921, *Bulletin* 24, 1923; Provincial Archives, "Bulkley Valley Stories: Collected from Old Timers Who Remember," ed., Tona Hetherington, 1973; Provincial Archives, Wiggs O'Neil, "Time and Place," (no date); R. Lynn Shervill, Smithers: From Swamp to Village (Smithers: The Town of Smithers, 1981); and Pat Turkki, Burns Lake and District: A History Formal and Informal (Burns Lake: Burns Lake Historical Society, 1973).

<sup>18</sup>For interesting reading on the early means of communication and transportation in the district by river steamers, canoes, and even dog teams, see Wiggs O'Neil, "Time and Place," Provincial Archives, (no date).

Prince Rupert and in the 1920s to local sawmills, as well as to transport passengers and small freight within the district. Railroading towns of Engen, Endako, Burns Lake, and Topley sprang up, only to be left surviving precariously once the construction camps were vacated. Small groups of maintenance workers remained, each composed of three to four men who lived in makeshift accommodation. By 1914 Burns Lake resembled a collection of tents rather than a permanent settlement, and many of these communities throughout the war years served as central meeting places for the lone prospectors, trappers, and land seekers.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the new railway helped establish small settlements when the construction crews cleared the land, and served as a communication corridor through the mountains, but from traffic underuse did not draw the men or capital needed to offset a general economic and population stagnation that occurred in the district only a decade later.<sup>20</sup>

The population of the district increased tremendously after 1918 primarily because of a more extensive transportation network, as well as soldier settlement schemes designed by the provincial government which offered 160 acres in return for \$10 and a specified amount of land improvement,<sup>21</sup> a slowly expanding service industry characteristic of new communities, increased need for railway ties for domestic use, and new mineral discoveries around Babine Lake. The district's population increased from approximately 2,000 in 1910 to over 8,000 by 1920; however, the growth was subsequently slowed by such factors as wildly fluctuating mineral markets, stability of railway tie demand,<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Mould, *Stumpfarms and Broadaxes*, pp. 131-134. For a good description of the settlements along the new G.T.P. railway which were composed primarily of tents and scattered cabins, see Turkki, *Burns Lake and District*, 1973.

<sup>20</sup>For a succinct summary of the rise and fall of the G.T.P. Railway, see Cole Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains, 1870-1930," *B.C. Studies* no. 58 (Summer 1983): 17-23. Also see Frank Leonard, "Grand Trunk Pacific and the Establishment of the City of Prince George, 1911-1915," *B.C. Studies*, no. 63 (Autumn 1984): 29-54.

<sup>21</sup>Mould, *Stumpfarms*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36. The tie industry remained constant throughout the 1920s, doing excellent business. Between 1924-1930 over five million ties were shipped out of the Burns Lake/South

land which in some areas proved to be unproductive, a lack of local markets for produce, and a falling market for furs. Between 1920-1930 the population in this vast territory had risen by only 1600 people.<sup>23</sup> The area remained overwhelmingly rural, characterized by unincorporated communities<sup>24</sup> with Smithers, Burns Lake, and Vanderhoof the only incorporated settlements and the only communities of more than 200 residents in the entire district by 1931.<sup>25</sup>

Within the district, trapping was a viable economic endeavour because deer, bear, coyote, rabbit, beaver, muskrat, fox, wolverine, marten, lynx, otter, pheasant, grouse, geese, and ducks proliferated throughout this region. Joining the trappers were mining prospectors who came in waves throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. The prospectors either worked alone staking out claims on previously unexplored rivers and mountains or they were employed by the Butte Company of Hazelton, for example, to mine the large gold, silver, copper, lead, iron, and zinc veins near Usk, Kispiox, Smithers, and Telkwa. Mining was less productive in the eastern part of the district, but a few placer mines which extracted small quantities of quartzite, silver, lead, and zinc existed in sporadic isolated settlements around Fort St. James and areas south of Francois Lake. Essentially, mining was a precarious industry. When the metal market was buoyant up to 1916, in 1922, and again in 1928, money and men flowed into nearby settlements, but when the price for the metals deflated, large mining companies folded just as quickly.

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<sup>22</sup>[continued] Bulkley Valley region.

<sup>23</sup>The figures were calculated from the 1931 Census, II, pp. 103-106.

<sup>24</sup>The 1931 Census defines "rural" as those areas not incorporated into cities, towns, villages, or hamlets. This is a useful distinction because "the incorporation of a town or village is a reflection of the needs of the surrounding area." (vol. I, p. 154).

<sup>25</sup>Smithers was incorporated as a village in 1921, and by 1931 had a recorded population of 999, Burns Lake was incorporated in 1923 with a population in 1931 of 202, and Vanderhoof's date was 1926, 1931 population 305. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

Until 1930 the district's population was highly transient. The individual precariousness of some of the economic activity caused rapid movements in population away from depressed areas and into regions where employment opportunities existed. Trappers and prospectors roamed the countryside, mining labourers came and went according to fluctuating markets, and railway, and later road construction workers stayed only as long as they were needed. After the First World War settlers arrived in increasing numbers aided by the new railway and growing network of pack trails which were widened for the horse and buggy, and later, the automobile.<sup>26</sup> The immigrants to the region spread out along the valley to Smithers, and they often mingled with travellers from the Skeena River. As well, prospective farmers and ranchers moved south into the rolling land which surrounded Francois and Ootsa Lakes. Homesteaders found excellent pastures for crop and stock-raising but even after the first financially lean years of land-clearing, with few local markets to sell produce, the style of farm living remained pioneer well into the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

In stark contrast to some other areas of Canada which when newly settled depended primarily on one industry to maintain economic sustenance, for example the fishing communities of the east and west coasts or the farming towns on the Prairies and southwestern Ontario, between 1900-1930 the settlers in the Upper Skeena, Bulkley Valley, Francois and Ootsa Lakes, and the Nechako Valley were often engaged in a number of economic activities within the same community. Trapping, mining, ranching, mixed-farming,<sup>28</sup> railway and road construction and maintenance, land clearing, and

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<sup>26</sup>For a look at the roads between Terrace and Vanderhoof during this time, see Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains," pp. 27-30.

<sup>27</sup>The 1931 Census show the Nechako region to be highly agricultural. Of the 1,920 residents recorded, 1,288 lived on farms (67 percent). (vol. VIII, pp. 764-765). Considering that individual farms were typically isolated, these figures reflect the scattered nature of the settlement in this part of the district.

<sup>28</sup>In this region, mixed farmers raised an assortment of crops which included wheat, oats, mixed grains, hay, potatoes, roots, corn, beans, peas, turnips, carrots, bush fruit, timothy, grass and

tie-hacking were all viable pursuits. Only tie-hacking and farming could be considered staple industries.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the tie-making industry was a "god-send" to the struggling settlers. Throughout the 1920s many farmers chose to supplement their subsistence in the winter as they took advantage of the virtually unlimited market for railway ties. Between October and April, when the ties could be easily transported over the snow or ice, summer farmers became "free-lance" tie-cutters or part of a group hired by a logging company<sup>30</sup> who cut down trees into manageable portions and transported the logs by horse and sleigh along icy paths to the railway.<sup>31</sup> The logs were loaded onto flatbeds from the railway sidings and shipped to local sawmills for processing.<sup>32</sup> The ties were used for local rail repair or sent to Prince Rupert for shipment to export markets. This rather straight-forward operation for the seasonal tie-hacker--the more trees cut the higher the pay--allowed "stumpfarmers" (land-clearers) and subsistence farmers the necessary resources, for example the money to purchase seed and farm equipment, to survive the summer months on their homesteads.<sup>33</sup>

The tie-making industry added both permanency and transiency to the district's population. Sawmills in Decker Lake, Rose Lake, and Quick ensured the existence of

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<sup>28</sup>[continued] clover seeds, and even rice. As well, some farmers raised horses, cattle, sheep, swine, and poultry. For a list of the district's farm livestock and produce, see the 1931 Census, VIII, pp. 728-753.

<sup>29</sup>See the Burns Lake Observer, 5 May 1927 for a contemporary account of the history of economic activity in the region.

<sup>30</sup>The most prominent contracting companies of tie-hackers were the Hanson Company of Smithers and Decker Lake's Anderson Company both of which sub-contracted out to two to six men operations throughout the countryside. See Mould, Stumpfarms, pp. 25-31.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-81.

<sup>32</sup>Established in 1906 in Prince Rupert, the Hanson Lumber and Timber Company moved its operations to Usk on the Skeena River, then in 1925 opened a sawmill in Smithers to gain better accessibility to local spruce and cedar poles. See ibid., pp. 15-25.

<sup>33</sup>Chad Gaffield's new book, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French-Language Controversy in Ontario (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1987) describes the logger/farmer in nineteenth century eastern Ontario. The "système agro-forestier" was remarkably similar to the subsistence farmer/winter tie-hacker of the north-central interior of British Columbia in the 1920s. Prescott County settlers relied on cutting wood in the winter to sell as lumber in order to survive the summer months on the farms. See pp. 83-89.

various settlements throughout the 1920s, while individual tie-hackers and those in camps of between two to twenty workers roamed the timbered wilderness for pine, spruce, and cedar trees. The hackers who were not part-time farmers were especially susceptible to being uprooted and forced to travel to less spent areas, and often their families were obliged to live in a succession of make-shift quarters as they moved from one shack to another with every new tie season.<sup>34</sup>

Either as separate or complementary occupations, tie-hacking and farming proliferated in all areas of the district, including the lakes and mountains south of Burns Lake (once the road system developed in the late 1920s) where logs were floated down streams or slid down ice and pulled up to the railway or local sawmill along snow-covered wagon trails. As mentioned, no one economic activity was an exclusive endeavour of a particular region, and in many areas community members were comprised of an assortment of trappers, miners, railway and road construction personnel, ranchers, tie-makers, or farmers. Within this mixture of mobile and permanent populations, the desire for educational opportunity was strong, evidenced by the proliferation of one-room schools in the district.

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<sup>34</sup>See Mould, Stumpfarms for an excellent account of the farmer/tie-hacker in the Bulkley Valley-Burns Lake region. The tie-hacking industry was often characterized by "cut and get out" operations. (p. 36).

### The Establishment of Schools, 1906-1930

Between 1906-1930 this district acquired sixty-seven schools. (See Table 1 and Map 3). The appearance of the schools closely followed settlement patterns. (See maps 4 i-iv). First established in major communities, the schools proliferated throughout the countryside. (See figures 1 and 2).<sup>35</sup> Hazelton, a steamship port, mining and fur-trading centre, as well as a large agricultural area, in 1906 became the first community in the district to establish an officially-recognized one-room school. The second one-room school was opened in 1913 in Telkwa, an early administrative and coal-mining centre. Schools sometimes appeared in places as sparsely populated as with only two or three families.<sup>36</sup> The majority of these one-room schools in the district were symbols of isolated civilization in the hinterland, the existence of a schoolhouse a signal of nearby settlers.

In general the district's schools were tiny, individual entities. A fact which would have concerned educational administrators who supported consolidation as a policy to remedy cost inefficiency in rural schools, between 1920-1930 the district's one-room schools enrolled only 0.5 percent (7,897) of all the pupils in the province (1,419,442) in 5.0 percent of the province's school buildings.<sup>37</sup> The average class size of these schools was 13.6 students, 25.3 percent less than the mean enrolment of all other assisted schools in the province and just over one half (51.2 percent) of the average class size of all rural and assisted schools.<sup>38</sup> Moreover between 1920-1930 the one-room schools in

<sup>35</sup>Note that the number of schools reflected the influx of settlers into the district especially between 1918-1923, and that the stagnation of the schools' growth in the 1920s corresponded with the drastic drop in immigration at that time.

<sup>36</sup>For example, Kispiox school, in a small farming and trapping settlement north of Hazelton had an enrolment of eight, all from one family. Bureau Records, 1928.

<sup>37</sup>The statistics were based on a compilation of averages. All figures were taken from the Annual Reports Statistical Tables.

<sup>38</sup>Assisted school figures are based on the Statistical Tables, 1926-1930, and for rural and assisted schools, 1920-1930. The class size of the one-room schools in the district was more

Table 1: School Activity On A Yearly Basis

Year	Opened	Closed	Other
1906	Hazelton		
1913	Telkwa		
1914	Fort Fraser New Hazelton Mapes Smithers	Telkwa Mapes	
1915	Chilco Copper City Endako Mapes Stellaco Vanderhoof		
1916	Alexander Manson: (Ootsa Lake) Engen Telkwa		SMITHERS upgraded to two divisions
1917	Houston Nechako Pacific	Engen	SMITHERS raised to rural status
1918	Burns Lake Usk	Alexander Manson: (Ootsa Lake)	
1919	Alexander Manson Bear Head Braeside Cedarvale Engen		SMITHERS upgraded to two divisions
1920	Bulkley North Bulkley South Ellesby Francois Lake Francois Lake South Lakes District Nithi River Round Lake	Bear Head Stellaco	BURNS LAKE upgraded to two divisions VANDERHOOF upgraded to two divisions

Table 1 (con't)

Year	Opened	Closed	Other
1921	Decker Lake Driftwood Creek Glentanna Hanall Orange Valley Tchesinkut Lake Topley Wistaria	Copper City	SMITHERS upgraded to three divisions SMITHERS opens a superior school USK upgraded to two divisions VANDERHOOF upgraded to three divisions
1922	Bear Head Colleymount Fraser Lake Grassy Plains Kitwanga Pratt Quick Southbank Tatalrose Uncha Valley Willowvale	Braeside	SMITHERS upgraded to four divisions
1923	Copper City Evelyn Fort Fraser North Fort St. James Kispiox Omenica Palling Streatham Woodcock Woodmere	Cedarvale Colleymount	SMITHERS downgraded to three divisions SMITHERS opens a high school USK raised to rural status VANDERHOOF raised to rural status VANDERHOOF opens a superior school
1924	Dorreen Perow Prairiedale	Grassy Plains Nechako	BURNS LAKE raised to rural status SMITHERS upgraded to four divisions TELKWA upgraded to two divisions
1925	Four Mile Settlement Tintagel	Bulkley N. Ellesby Engen Glentanna Hanall Pratt	TELKWA raised to rural status

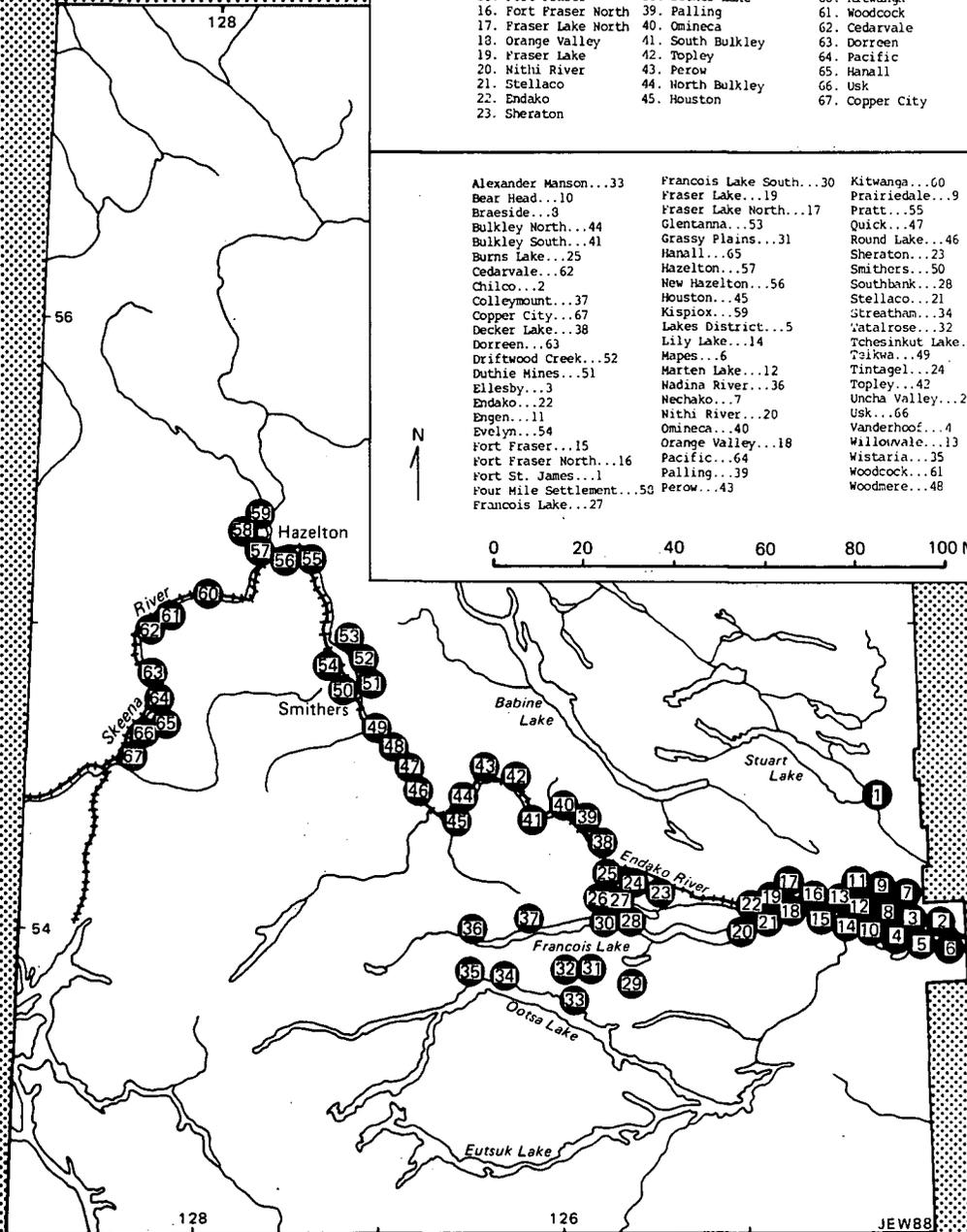
Table 1 (con't)

Year	Opened	Closed	Other
1926	Engen Fraser Lake North Glentanna Sheraton	Bear Head	FORT FRASER raised to rural status HAZELTON raised to rural status NEW HAZELTON raised to rural status
1927	Cedarvale Lily Lake Marten Lake	Decker Lake	FORT FRASER upgraded to two divisions SMITHERS upgraded to five divisions USK downgraded to one division
1928	Decker Lake Duthie Mines Grassy Plains	Fort Fraser N. Nithi River	HOUSTON raised to rural status
1929	Colleymount Nadina River	Decker Lake Glentanna Omineca	VANDERHOOF upgraded to four divisions
1930	Decker Lake Glentanna Nithi River	Uncha Valley	HAZELTON upgraded to two divisions NEW HAZELTON upgraded to two divisions FORT FRASER lowered to assisted status SMITHERS upgraded to six divisions

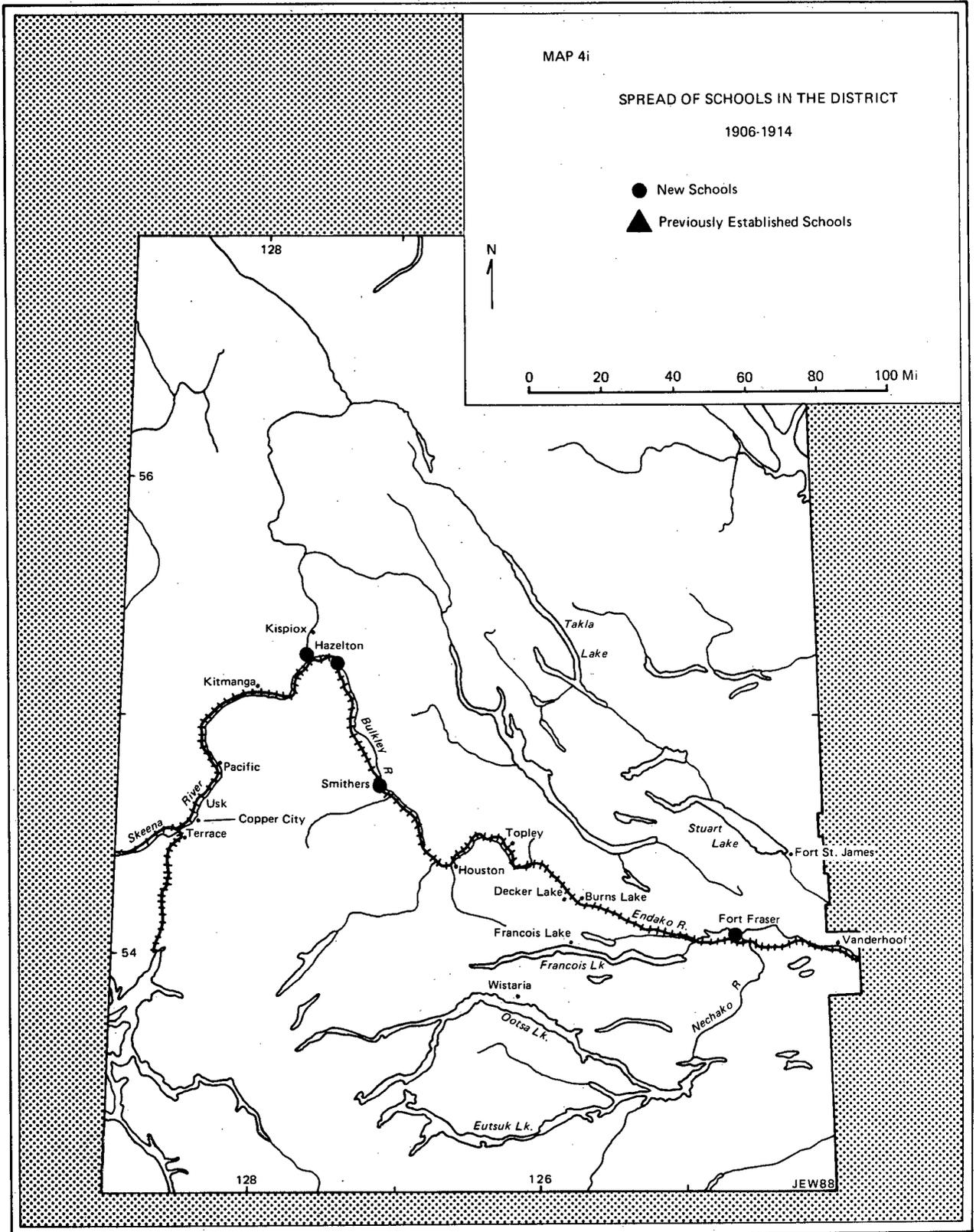
MAP 3 SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT 1906-1930

- |                       |                         |                          |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Fort St. James     | 24. Tintagel            | 46. Round Lake           |
| 2. Chilco             | 25. Burns Lake          | 47. Quick                |
| 3. Ellesby            | 26. Tchesinkut Lake     | 48. Woodmere             |
| 4. Vanderhoof         | 27. Francois Lake       | 49. Telkwa               |
| 5. Lakes District     | 28. Southbank           | 50. Smithers             |
| 6. Mapes              | 29. Uncha Valley        | 51. Duthie Mines         |
| 7. Nechako            | 30. Francois Lake South | 52. Driftwood Creek      |
| 8. Braeside           | 31. Grassy Plains       | 53. Glentanna            |
| 9. Prairiedale        | 32. Tatalrose           | 54. Evelyn               |
| 10. Bear Head         | 33. Alexander Manson    | 55. Pratt                |
| 11. Engen             | 34. Streatham           | 56. New Hazelton         |
| 12. Marten Lake       | 35. Wistaria            | 57. Hazelton             |
| 13. Willowvale        | 36. Nadina River        | 58. Four Mile Settlement |
| 14. Lily Lake         | 37. Colleymount         | 59. Kispiox              |
| 15. Fort Fraser       | 38. Decker Lake         | 60. Kitwanga             |
| 16. Fort Fraser North | 39. Pallang             | 61. Woodcock             |
| 17. Fraser Lake North | 40. Omneca              | 62. Cedarvale            |
| 18. Orange Valley     | 41. South Bulkley       | 63. Dorreen              |
| 19. Fraser Lake       | 42. Topley              | 64. Pacific              |
| 20. Nithi River       | 43. Perow               | 65. Hanall               |
| 21. Stellaco          | 44. North Bulkley       | 66. Usk                  |
| 22. Endako            | 45. Houston             | 67. Copper City          |
| 23. Sheraton          |                         |                          |

- |                           |                          |                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Alexander Manson...33     | Francois Lake South...30 | Kitwanga...60        |
| Bear Head...10            | Fraser Lake...19         | Prairiedale...9      |
| Braeside...3              | Fraser Lake North...17   | Pratt...55           |
| Bulkley North...44        | Glentanna...53           | Quick...47           |
| Bulkley South...41        | Grassy Plains...31       | Round Lake...46      |
| Burns Lake...25           | Hanall...65              | Sheraton...23        |
| Cedarvale...62            | Hazelton...57            | Smithers...50        |
| Chilco...2                | New Hazelton...56        | Southbank...28       |
| Colleymount...37          | Houston...45             | Stellaco...21        |
| Copper City...67          | Kispiox...59             | Streatham...34       |
| Decker Lake...38          | Lakes District...5       | Tatalrose...32       |
| Dorreen...63              | Lily Lake...14           | Tchesinkut Lake...26 |
| Driftwood Creek...52      | Mapes...6                | Telikwa...49         |
| Duthie Mines...51         | Marten Lake...12         | Tintagel...24        |
| Ellesby...3               | Nadina River...36        | Topley...42          |
| Engen...11                | Nechako...7              | Uncha Valley...29    |
| Evelyn...54               | Nithi River...20         | Usk...66             |
| Fort Fraser...15          | Omneca...40              | Vanderhoof...4       |
| Fort Fraser North...16    | Orange Valley...18       | Willowvale...13      |
| Fort St. James...1        | Pacific...64             | Wistaria...35        |
| Four Mile Settlement...58 | Pallang...39             | Woodcock...61        |
| Francois Lake...27        | Perow...43               | Woodmere...48        |



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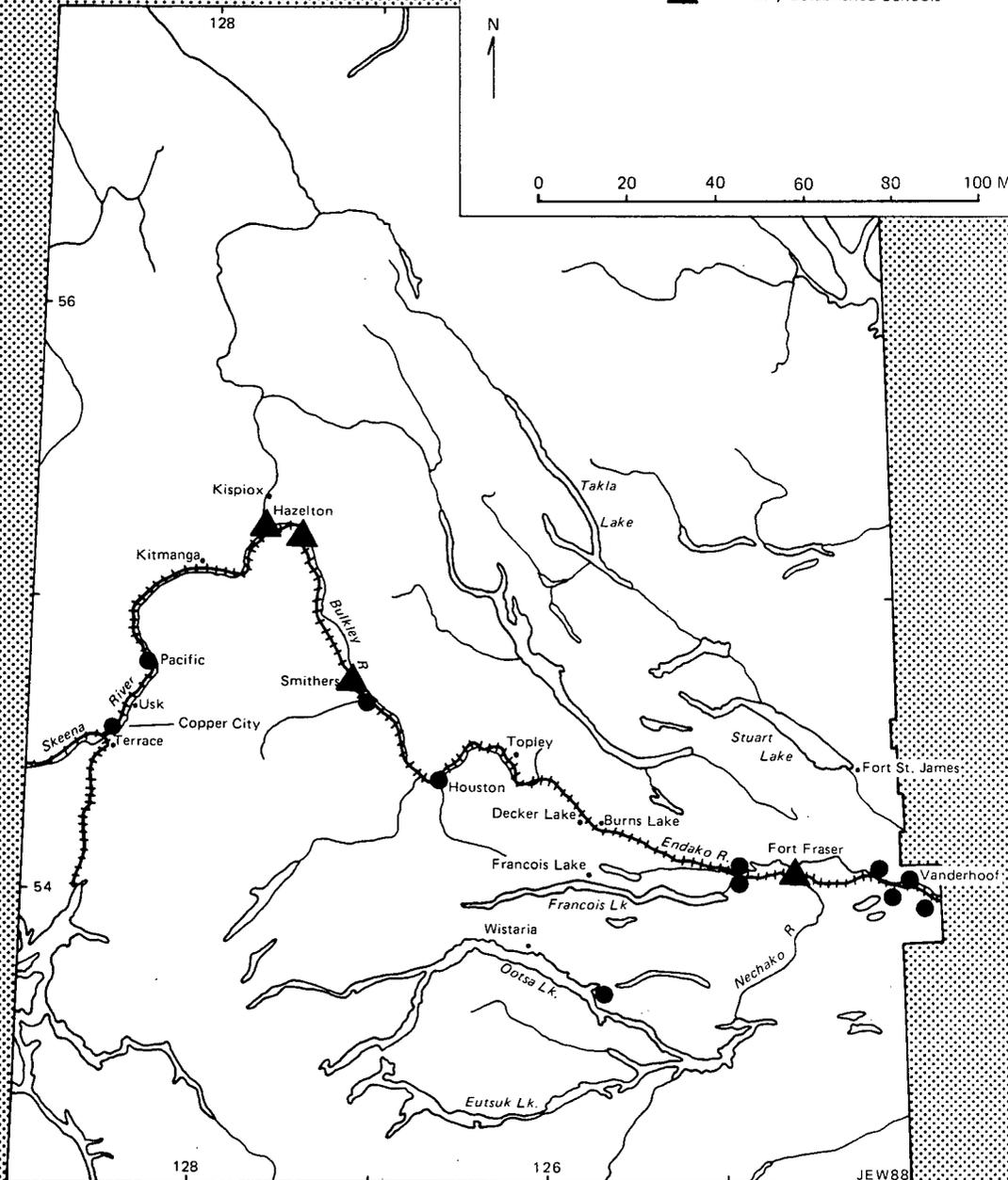
MAP 4ii

SPREAD OF SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT

1915-1917

● New Schools

▲ Previously Established Schools



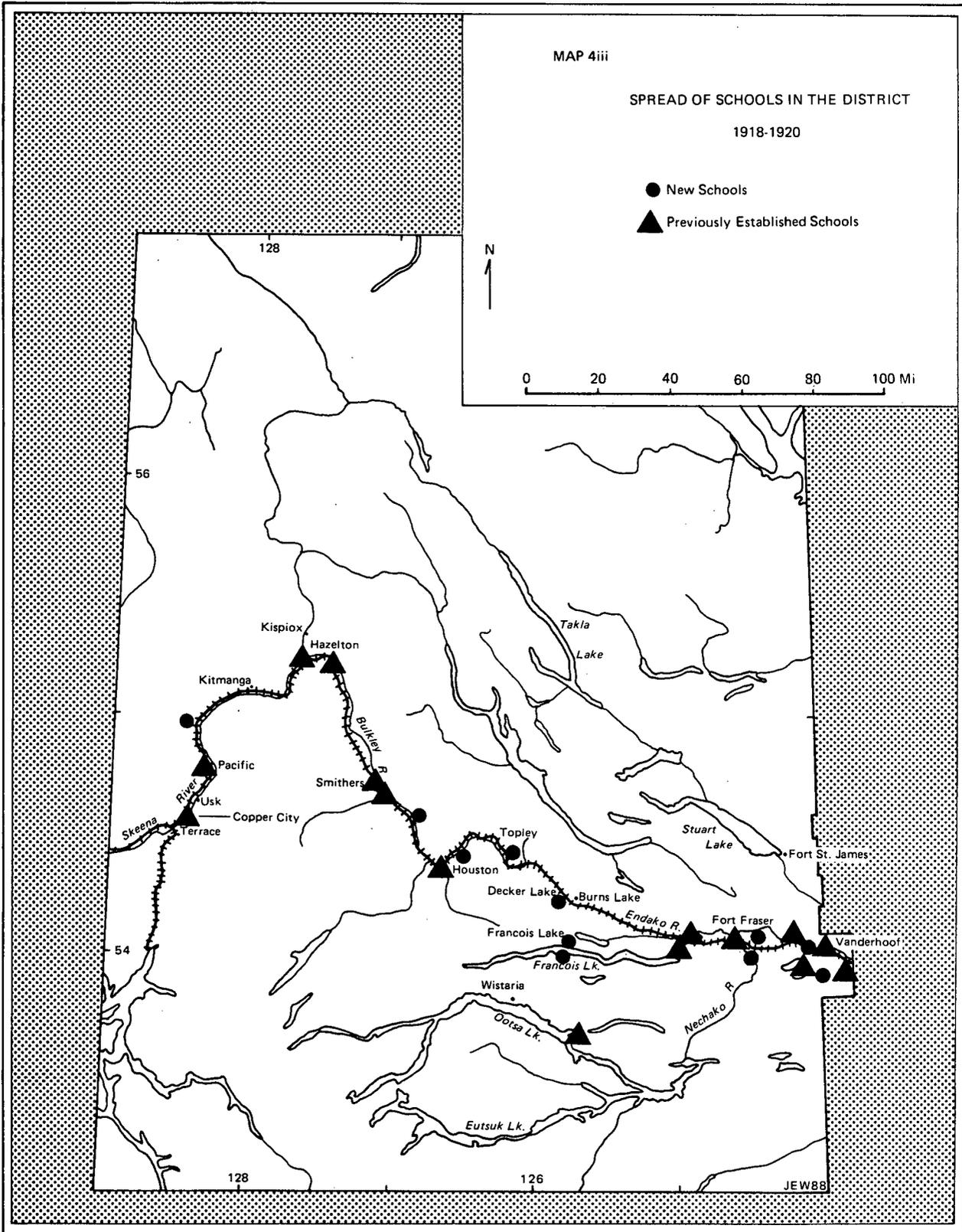
MAP 4iii

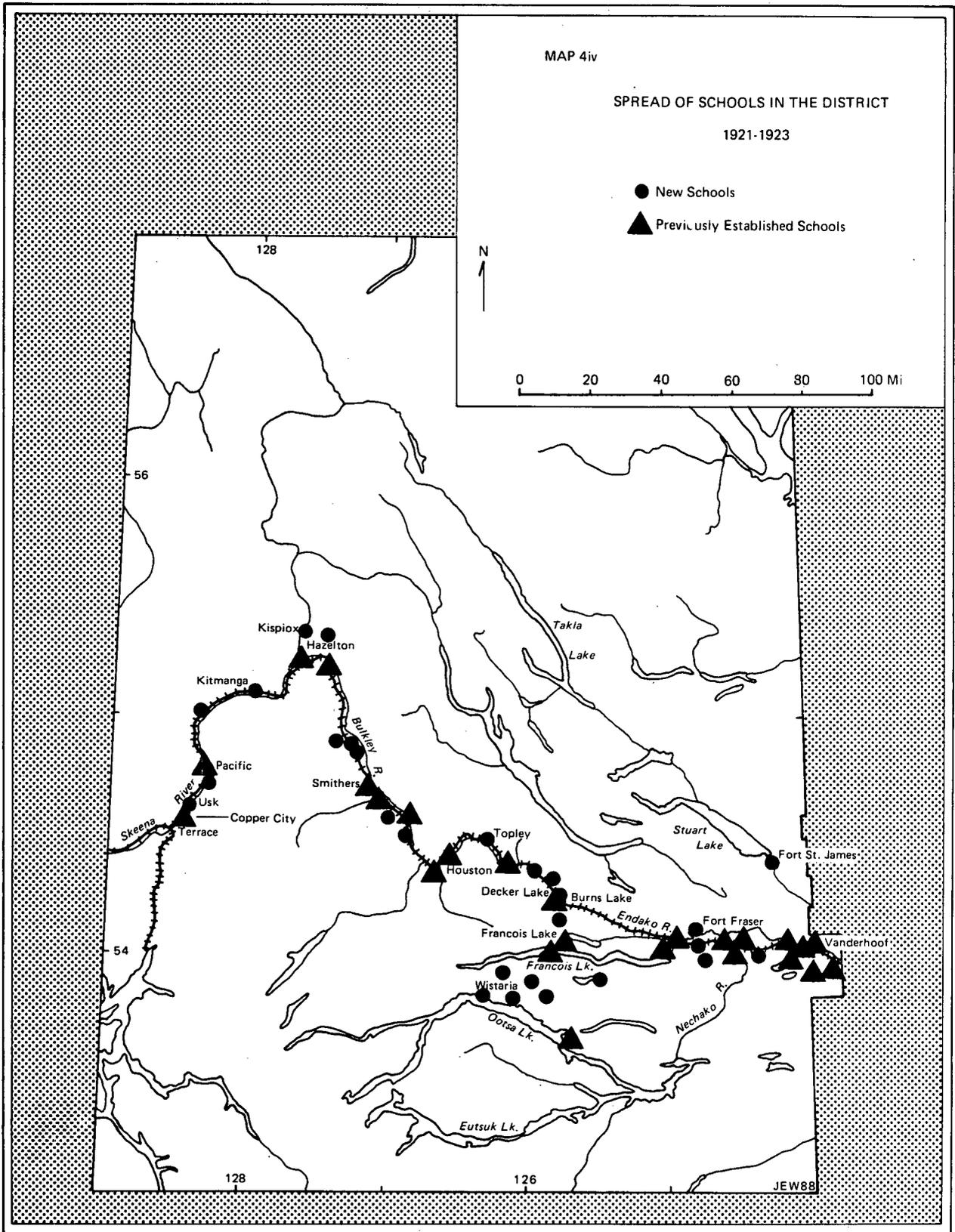
SPREAD OF SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT  
1918-1920

- New Schools
- ▲ Previously Established Schools



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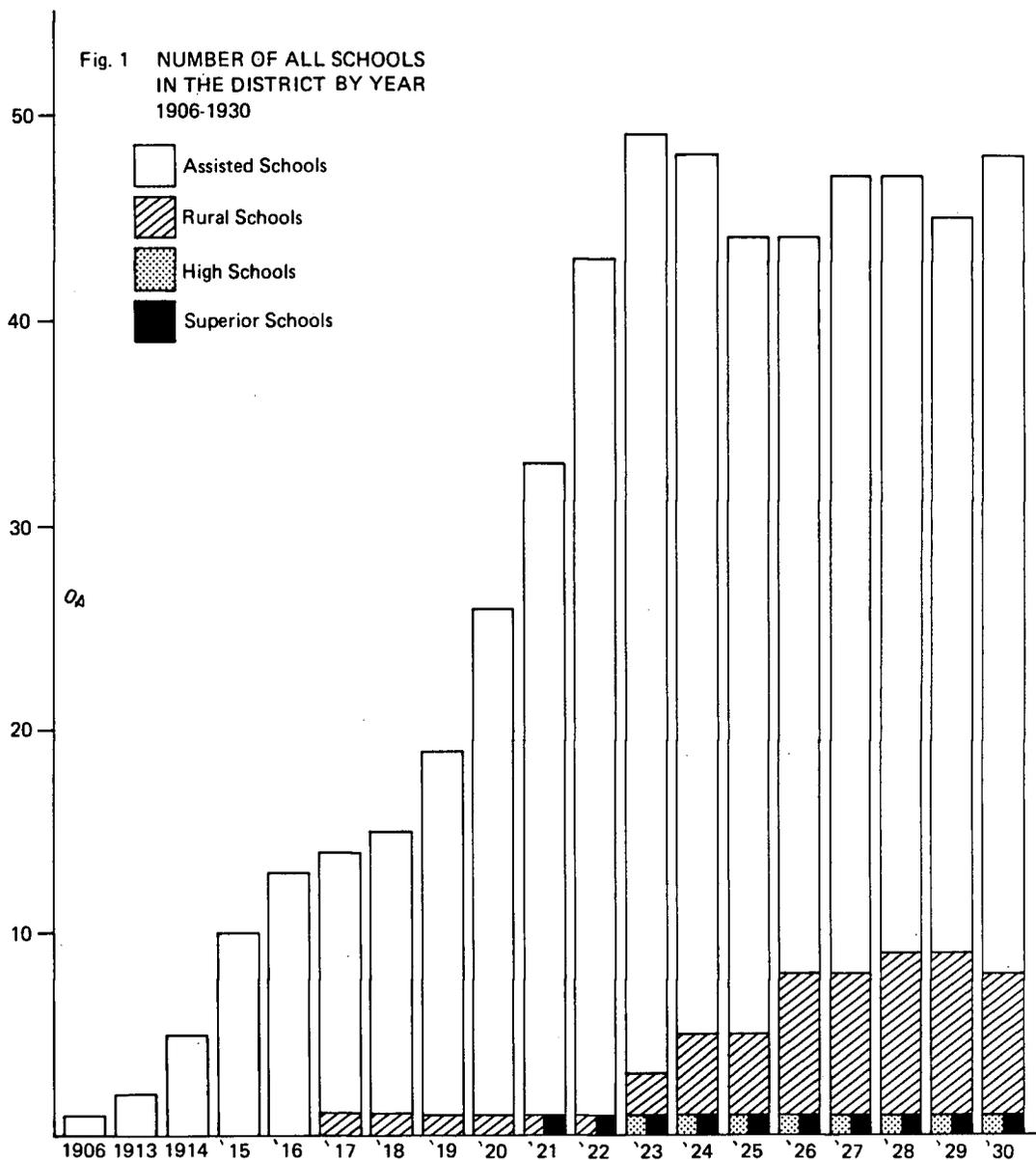
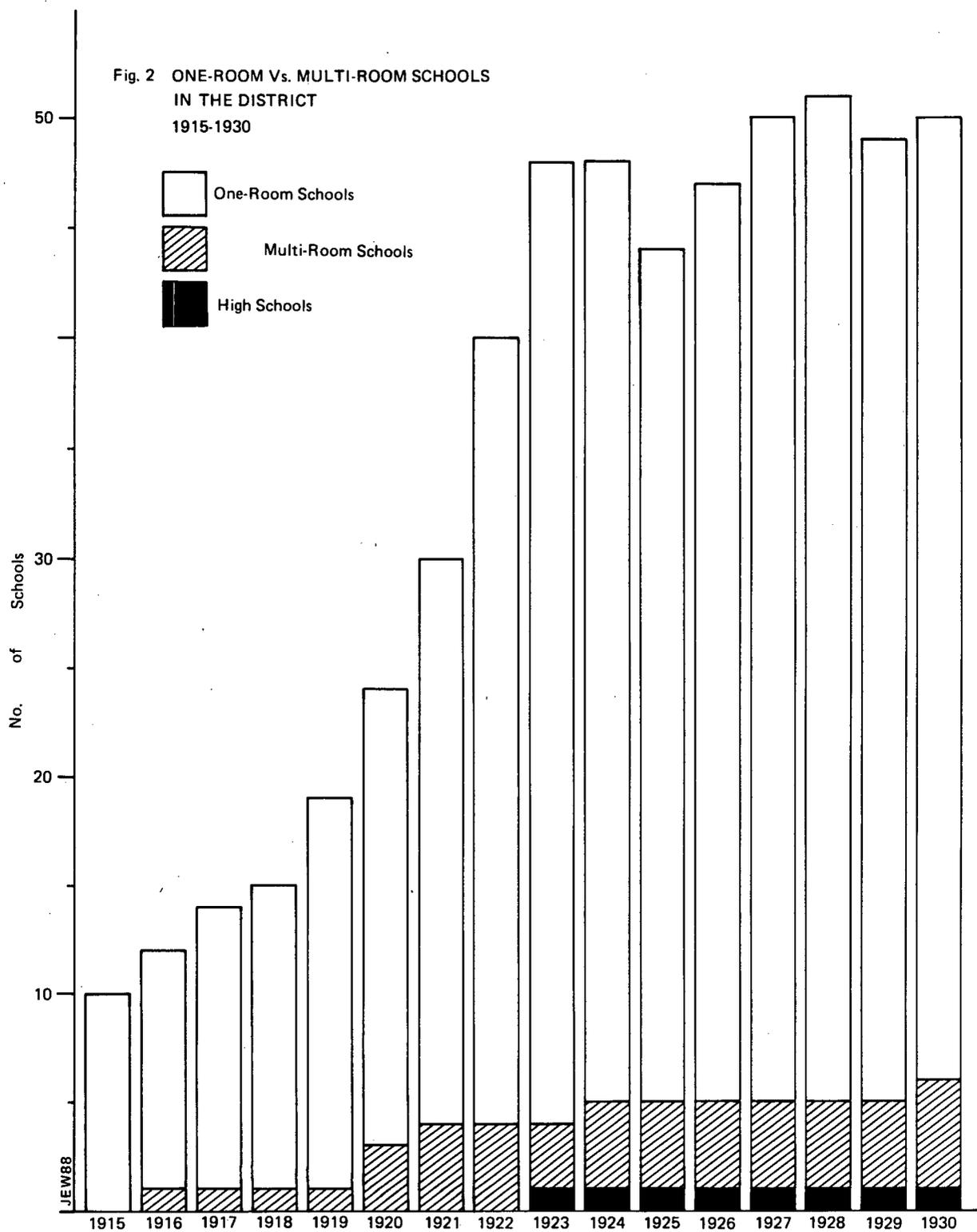


Fig. 2 ONE-ROOM Vs. MULTI-ROOM SCHOOLS  
IN THE DISTRICT  
1915-1930



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the district were getting smaller. The school enrolment in 1919 was 16.7 pupils; 1921: 15.9 pupils; the enrolment fluctuated for five years until 1927 when an average class size was 13.9 pupils, and steadily declined to the 1930 figure of 12.8. (See Figure 3).

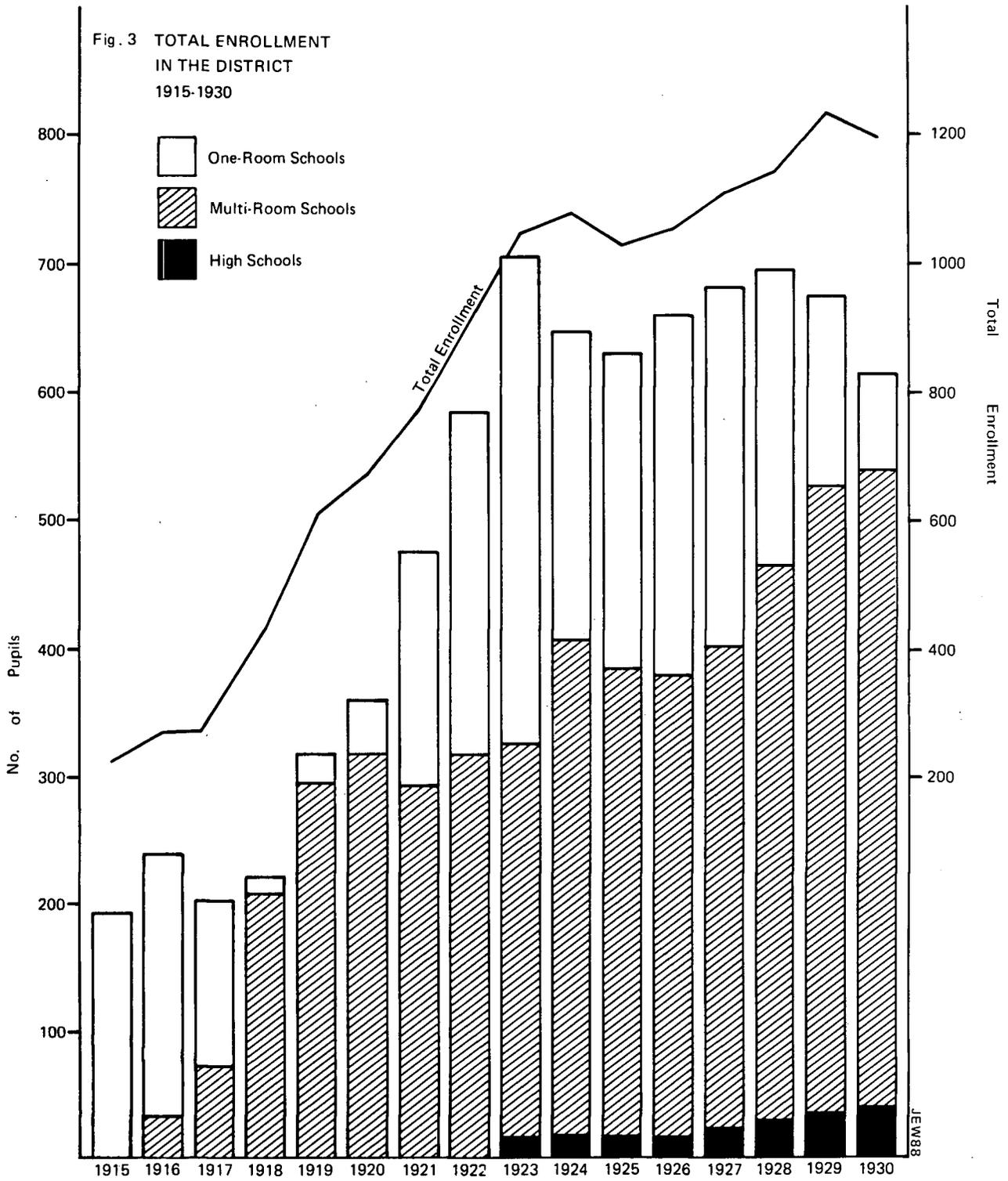
Between 1927-1930 the number of one-room and multi-roomed schools in the district remained approximately constant. Comparing this with Figure 2, during this time a corresponding increase in the proportion of pupils who attended high schools may have indicated "an ever increasing demand for high-school privileges throughout the [district]"<sup>39</sup> while the increased percentage of pupils who were enrolled in multi-roomed elementary schools could have reflected the growing power of larger settlements to draw population as opposed to the smaller, more isolated communities which typically had stagnant subsistence economies.

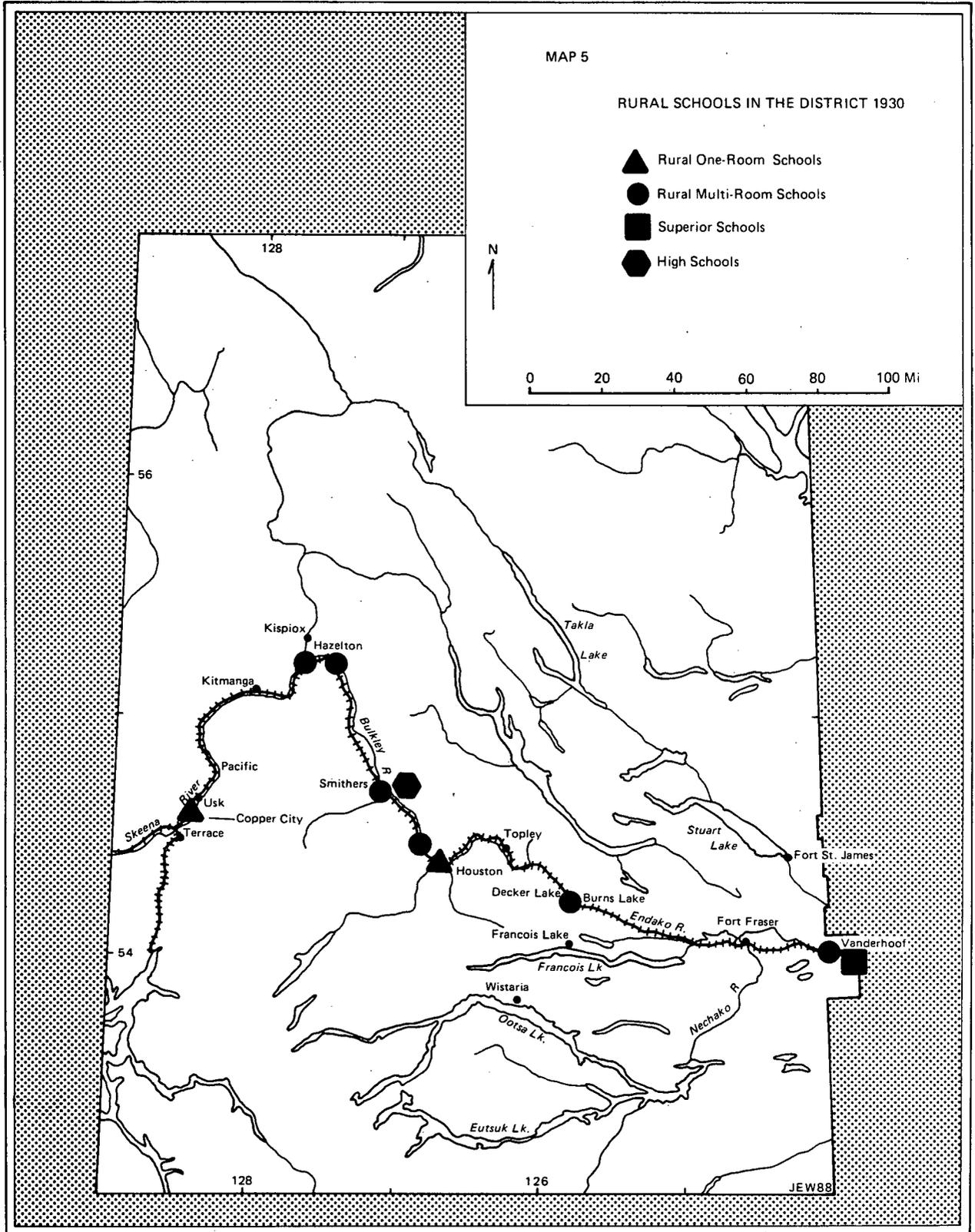
While most schools in the district remained small and assisted throughout the 1920s, others evolved into multi-roomed rural schools. (See Map 5). Starting out as one-room buildings with characteristically small enrolments, one-room schools grew rapidly in size as communities were forced to create new school divisions to cope with an expanding school population.<sup>40</sup> By 1930 Vanderhoof, Burns Lake, Telkwa, Smithers, Hazelton, and New Hazelton had all established multi-roomed rural schools with an average enrolment of ninety, Vanderhoof with four divisions and a superior school, and Smithers with six divisions along with a high school. Although fifty one-room schools were open in 1930, the multi-divisional schools enrolled close to half of the pupils in the district. (See Figure 3).

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<sup>38</sup>[continued] representative of other one-room schools in the province than the statistics would indicate because the average enrolment figures for the provincial assisted schools (18.2 pupils) include some multi-roomed buildings.

<sup>39</sup>Annual Report, 1924, p. T57.

<sup>40</sup>Divisions were the number of separate classes (not grades) in the school.





The multi-room schools in the district suggested local prosperity. By 1930 Smithers and Vanderhoof were bustling commercial depots while Hazelton, New Hazelton, and Burns Lake remained solvent through a large diversified economic base, namely the financial impetus afforded by sawmills which opened in mid-decade. Usk one-room school went to two divisions in 1921 but in 1927 lost half its pupils probably as a result of family migration out of the community when the Hanson Lumber and Timber Company transferred inland operations from Terrace and Usk to Smithers.<sup>41</sup> Fort Fraser was the only rural school in the district to revert to an assisted one. While its enrolment remained steady the community's school contribution from a calculated property tax dropped from \$2,000 in 1928 to \$1,000 in 1930. This was possibly a sign of the community's growing dependence on subsistence mixed-farming as the Nechako Valley settlements came under increased competition because the Burns Lake tie-hackers had resources which were plentiful and more accessible to the major processing centres of Houston and Smithers.<sup>42</sup>

Similar to the larger schools, the one-room schools proliferated in areas of collective economic activity, for example the mixed-farming/tie-hacking/ranching/trapping/railway communities of the Nechako Valley and Francois-Ootsa Lake areas, the Bulkley Valley where mining was pursued as well, and the the struggling railway stops/mining/ranching/tie-hacking settlements of the Skeena River. Also, schools were established on trade and transportation routes, most notably on Southbank and Tchesinkut Lake wagon

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<sup>41</sup>The W.R. Wright Company's sawmill in nearby Hanall closed at the same time. See Sperry Cline, Along the Totem Trail, pp. 23-28. Smithers experienced an immediate influx of students in 1924 whereby a new division was added to the school, with another increase in the school population in 1927. This may have been a result of the Hanson Company's move of headquarters there and the accompanied increase of timber cutting in the countryside. See Mould, Stumpfarms, pp. 16-20.

<sup>42</sup>See Alice Belsham and J. Philip Myers, "History of Fort Fraser," 1958, and for more on the increasing predominance of Houston and Burns Lake tie-hackers, see Mould, Stumpfarms, pp. 24-40.

trails south of Burns Lake and up the old "Telegraph Trail" on the Kispiox River north of Hazelton. Inferences which connect the existence and behaviour of the schools (openings and closures, enrolment fluctuations) to local economic activity, however, presume that the settlers considered the schools to be an important social institution. Indeed, this claim is supported by the timing of the school's appearance in each community. Certainly to the inspectors new communities were synonymous with new schools. G.H. Gower of the vast Prince Rupert Inspectorate was the first official in the Annual Reports to recognize the potential for school expansion in the province's central interior. In 1915 he noted the possibility of an increase in the already steady influx of settlers (a trickle compared to 1918 immigration) whereby the railway "has brought within reach of the settler large areas of fertile land hitherto quite inaccessible and made possible their permanent occupation."<sup>43</sup> A.R. Lord, who inspected the same district in 1919, saw schools as a measure of settlement.

During the year under review development in Central British Columbia has been more extensive than in any previous year. Among contributing factors have been the opening-up of new mineral properties; lumbering activities on the Coast;...agricultural settlement in the Nechako, Bulkley, Francois-Ootsa Lake...Districts. Of these, the last-mentioned industry easily holds first place in importance, as the majority of the new settlers are farmers from the Prairie Provinces who are possessed of both capital and experience. A variety of statistics are available as to the extent of this development, but the truest indication is afforded by the number of schools which have been organized.<sup>44</sup>

In 1921 J.M. Paterson of the newly-bounded Prince Rupert Inspectorate, now extended only as far east as Endako as opposed previously to the Alberta border, accurately reported a one hundred percent jump in teachers in the district over two

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<sup>43</sup>Annual Report, 1915, p. A42.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1919, p. A35.

years, and along with Gower, who now inspected the Prince George District, noticed an increased need for school facilities, in particular superior and high schools.<sup>45</sup> Petitions for schools poured in, "indicative of the rapid development of northern British Columbia, especially in the Omineca,"<sup>46</sup> and "the establishment of new schools year after year indicates the steady growth of this northern section of the Province."<sup>47</sup>

Local histories allow for a closer look into the chronology of various settlements and many of them indicate that the necessary three-man school board, elected among members of the immediate district, as well as the required ten pupil enrolment for a new school,<sup>48</sup> were in place shortly after the population was large enough to support such an institution.<sup>49</sup> The schools were established in conjunction with other buildings of community service, very often immediately after the construction of the local church. For example, in Burns Lake the rush for land which brought settlers into the region in 1917 saw a church built that same year, a school the next year, followed in 1919 by restaurants, stores, a post office, and police.<sup>50</sup> Into the 1930s the scattered settlements around Ootsa Lake opened schools before the establishment of the post office and general store. Interestingly, in communities populated by transient families, schools often appeared before the construction of the community hall--a building which signified commitment to and administrative responsibility for the particular region. Other local histories even of communities with extremely high transient populations offer a similar

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 1921, pp. F38-39. The closest high schools at this time were in Prince Rupert and Prince George. Smithers opened a superior school in this year.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 1922, p. C39. Omineca was the electoral district which included the area east of Prince Rupert to Rose Lake, north of Burns Lake.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 1923, p. P40. For further comments on the steady public demand for schooling, see 1924, pp. T57-59; 1925 p. M39; and 1929 p. R33.

<sup>48</sup>As stipulated in the Annual Report, 1896, p. 185.

<sup>49</sup>Prior to the construction of the Alexander Manson (Ootsa Lake) and Wistaria schools north of the Lake in 1916 and 1921 respectively, pupils were collectively schooled in private homes. Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 289-295.

<sup>50</sup>See ibid., pp. 30-40.

chronology.<sup>51</sup>

Often schools would open with far fewer than ten pupils--schools would temporarily "borrow" pupils from nearby schools to fulfill the necessary minimum<sup>52</sup>--and the schools established in poor settlements suggest that education to many was an important concern, at times second only to making a living.<sup>53</sup> When the school first appeared in a community in relation to other frontier social institutions, however, is a crude index of local interest in education because it does not elucidate those areas which were settled but had no school up to 1930.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, it does not show the degree to which the community members followed school policy as put forth by Department of Education officials, contibuted financially to the school, allowed their children to attend, or supported the teacher. To get at these kinds of questions the next chapter will take a closer look at certain aspects of teaching experiences, in particular teaching and living conditions, and local politics, which contributed to the overall mystique of the British Columbia one-room school in the 1920s as existing on a financial precipice, unpredictable in community support and pedagogical quality, and distinctly unique in character.

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<sup>51</sup>See especially *ibid.*, p. 184, for the South Bulkley school at Forestdale; A. George Shephard, "History of Schools in School District Number 54," Provincial Archives, Victoria B.C., 1971, for Evelyn school; and for Southbank one-room school, The Southside Centennial Committee, "The Story of a North-Central Settlement: The South Side of Francois Lake," Provincial Archives, Victoria B.C., 1959.

<sup>52</sup>Between 1915-1930 several one-room schools in the district operated with fewer than ten pupils, sometimes with an enrolment as few as three or four pupils. Examples of "borrowing" pupils were recorded in various Bulkley Valley schools, (Mould, *Stumpfarms*, pp. 111-117); Southbank school, (South Side Centennial Committee, "The Story of a North-Central Settlement, Provincial Archives); and Round Lake school, (Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing*, p. 84). A question arises, however, which concerns the enrolment and attendance figures for each school in the district. Verifying the accuracy of these statistics is impossible. Evidence does not exist of "borrowed" pupils who may have returned to their own school districts sometime during the school year, or of outright teacher misrepresentation of the number of pupils in the school in an effort to keep the school open and teaching jobs secure.

<sup>53</sup>In *Stumpfarms*, Mould argues that schooling was second on the list of pioneer's priorities. See p. 111.

<sup>54</sup>Histories of settlements such as, for example, Moricetown and Seaton between Hazelton and Smithers, and Priestly west of Endako are unavailable. Local histories of the district tend to ignore peripheral communities; instead the histories outline the events in a region in the context of the largest nearby settlement. Larger, more sophisticated local histories, for example Shervill's *Smithers*, and to a lesser extent Hancock, *Vanderhoof*, are particularly guilty on this count.

## Chapter IV: The One-Room Schools

### Teacher Transiency

Similar to most rural areas in British Columbia in the 1920s, the communities between Terrace and Vanderhoof in which one-room schools were located were typically impoverished, isolated, and rugged. Apart from stretches of arable land, in several places the district was heavily forested and mountainous with lakes and streams running throughout the terrain. This created picturesque scenery but was a severe impediment to transportation and communication. The road system was designed to supplement railway and shipping routes--the roads in this district were used primarily to transport ties to railway sidings--and as a result little external capital for construction or upkeep was available.<sup>1</sup> Even with the advent of the automobile in the district in the early 1920s, the roads often resembled widened tracks of mud. A road journey between the more populated area of Burns Lake to Smithers entailed a long, hazardous day's trek, usually done only in case of emergencies.<sup>2</sup> The railway remained the primary mode of transportation for the settlers but because of the inadequate road system many of the settlements throughout the district remained remote and isolated. Some communities became islands of civilization, even more so when the snow fell which left only foot and

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<sup>1</sup>See Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains," pp. 23-30 for an interesting description of the province's road system during this time.

<sup>2</sup>Mould, *Stumpfarms*, pp. 93-96. Even travelling by the railway was harrowing. "Travelling by way-freight was a nerve-wracking experience: there was no service, no heat, and of course, no schedule..." (pp. 97-98). Mildred McQuillan who taught in Orange Valley School for four months in 1927 could not wait to go home in December but on her way to the steamship at Prince Rupert she was delayed in Pacific, by Terrace, for eighteen hours because the railway was covered with twenty feet of snow from a recent snowslide. Her experiences of waiting for trains, and, for example, desperately trying to keep the railway station's lanterns lit in blowing snow are also recorded. See the McQuillan Diary, 1927.

sleigh trails to the railway, which in Fort St. James and the Ootsa Lake settlements was more than fifty miles distant.<sup>3</sup>

In relation to organizational duties, the inspectors often commented on the predominance of small, scattered isolated settlements and schools in the district. In 1921 Gower's work was largely of "pioneer nature" because his Prince George Inspectorate, bounded to the west by Endako, was populated by "new and widely scattered settlements."<sup>4</sup> In 1922 Inspector H.C. Fraser of the Prince Rupert district found that "many of these schools are in remote sections and quite isolated; consequently much time spent in travel."<sup>5</sup> As late as 1929 Fraser, Gower, and A.R. Lord repeatedly commented on the sparse nature of the district's settlements.<sup>6</sup>

As previously discussed many of the communities existed with little expendible capital. In 1917 A.R. Lord of the Prince Rupert Inspectorate summed up best the situation of many of the smaller settlements, some of which would later open a school with a below minimum required enrolment.

The most serious problem from an educational standpoint in British Columbia is the question of single families and small communities in isolated localities. Many cases exist where one or two families with a few children have settled on land miles from the nearest neighbour, and where, under present conditions, these children are growing to manhood and womanhood in comparative if not absolute ignorance. Their parents are quite unable for financial reasons to send them outside to be educated, and in the majority of instances it will be years before ten children--the minimum requirement for an assisted

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<sup>3</sup>Interestingly, only twelve years before the local school's opening in 1918, Burns Lake was so remote that the settlers communicated with smoke signals. See Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 225.

<sup>4</sup>Annual Report, 1921, p. F39.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 1922, p. C39.

<sup>6</sup>See especially ibid., 1916, p. A41; 1917, p. A43; 1920, p. C37; 1924, p. T59; and 1929, p. R33. In 1931, the population density of all of District 8 (which included the Prince George area east to the Alberta border) was a lowly .30 people per square mile versus a density of .83 people in all of the rural areas in the province. 1931 Census, I, pp. 360-362.

school--are in residence.<sup>7</sup>

In some areas snow, mud, dust, torrential rain, and mosquitoes added to generally miserable physical conditions.<sup>8</sup>

This district was fraught with incidents historically characteristic of frontier settlement. Much of the activities of the larger communities such as Burns Lake and Houston centred around gambling houses, red light districts, and beer parlours, the scene of some "awesome binges."<sup>9</sup> In 1910 Shorty Dunn, Bill Miner's train-robbing accomplice hid out in Ootsa Lake,<sup>10</sup> and the New Hazelton bank was held up in 1913 and again in 1914 when three of four bandits were shot and killed.<sup>11</sup> Accidental deaths were not uncommon, for example in 1920 when two Wistaria settlers were killed, one by a falling tree, the other fell through the ice on Ootsa Lake. Another settler drowned on Francois Lake in 1922 as did the schoolteacher for Decker Lake one-room school in the same year.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of the buildings in this district were constructed of wood (ninety-eight percent!)<sup>13</sup> and in the 1920s devastating fires destroyed homesteads and schools in Willowvale, Wistaria, Tchesinkut Lake, Decker Lake, South Bulkley (Forestdale), and Houston. The lack of adequate housing prompted one resident to report that "there is alot of suffering and cold in the Hazelton district."<sup>14</sup> Wild animals such as

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<sup>7</sup>Annual Report, 1917, p. A43.

<sup>8</sup>For McQuillan, mud and slush seemed to be everywhere in Orange Valley. See the McQuillan Diary, 1927.

<sup>9</sup>Mould, Stumpfarms, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 272.

<sup>11</sup>Beatrice Williscroft, "Memories of the Bulkley Valley During Construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway," Provincial Archives, Victoria B.C., 1976, (no page number).

<sup>12</sup>See Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 172, 263, and 289-293. As well, in June 1927 the Burns Lake Observer reported that a man had lost his life on the rapids near Ootsa Lake, and in the same month a trapper died from exposure by Big Eutsuk Lake, in the southernmost part of the district.

<sup>13</sup>1931 Census, V, p. 963.

<sup>14</sup>Burns Lake Observer, 28 April 1927.

bears and wolves constantly played havoc with settlers' nerves.<sup>15</sup> Between 1929-1932 Lottie Bowron visited 37 of the schools in the district, and based on her loose criteria of comfort and safety designated fully half or 18 of the schools as those in which only a man or older married woman should be sent.<sup>16</sup>

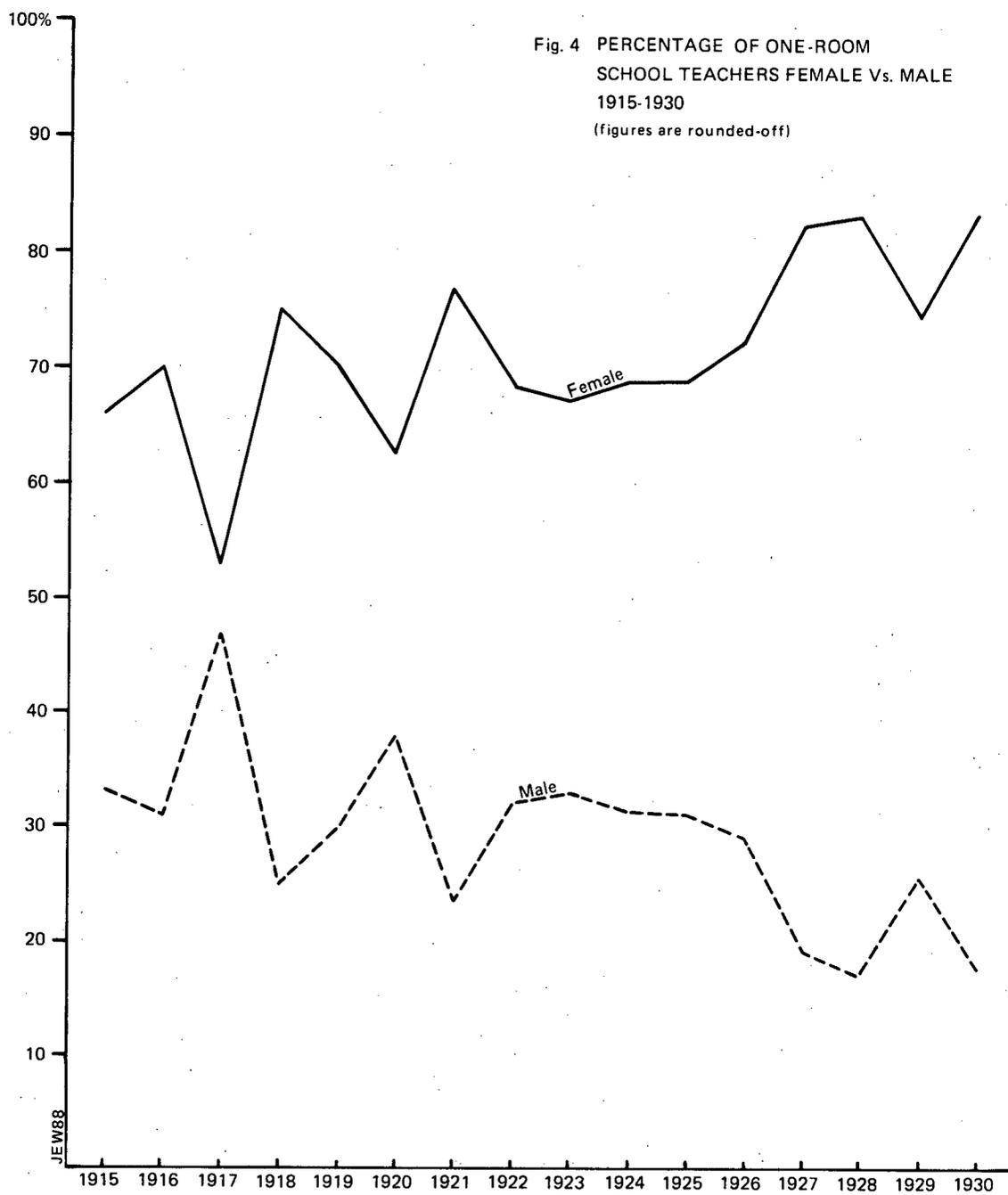
Into this milieu the one-room school teacher came...and left: but first, the teacher herself. Between 1915-1930 a total of 579 one-room school teachers taught in the district which represented 1.2 percent of the total teaching workforce in the province and 4.6 percent of all rural and assisted school teachers. In 1924 Inspector H.C. Fraser of Prince Rupert accurately observed that "The North is a man's country,"<sup>17</sup> as in 1925 in the district 31.1 percent of all one-room school teachers were male versus a province-wide proportion for rural and assisted schools of 21.0 percent. Despite the exhortations from Bowron, into the 1930s the percentage of teachers who were women and unmarried increased. (See Figures 4 and 5).<sup>18</sup> Starting in 1924, the one-room school teachers in the district followed a provincial rural and assisted school trend of becoming more highly qualified, as in that year of all one-room school teachers 27.0 percent held either an academic or first class teaching certificate versus 70.8 percent with a second or third class certificate. By 1930 the gap had closed to 40.4 percent as opposed to 57.7 percent respectively, the remaining number in possession of a temporary certificate. Taking a random year, however, for example 1926, the district's teachers were slightly

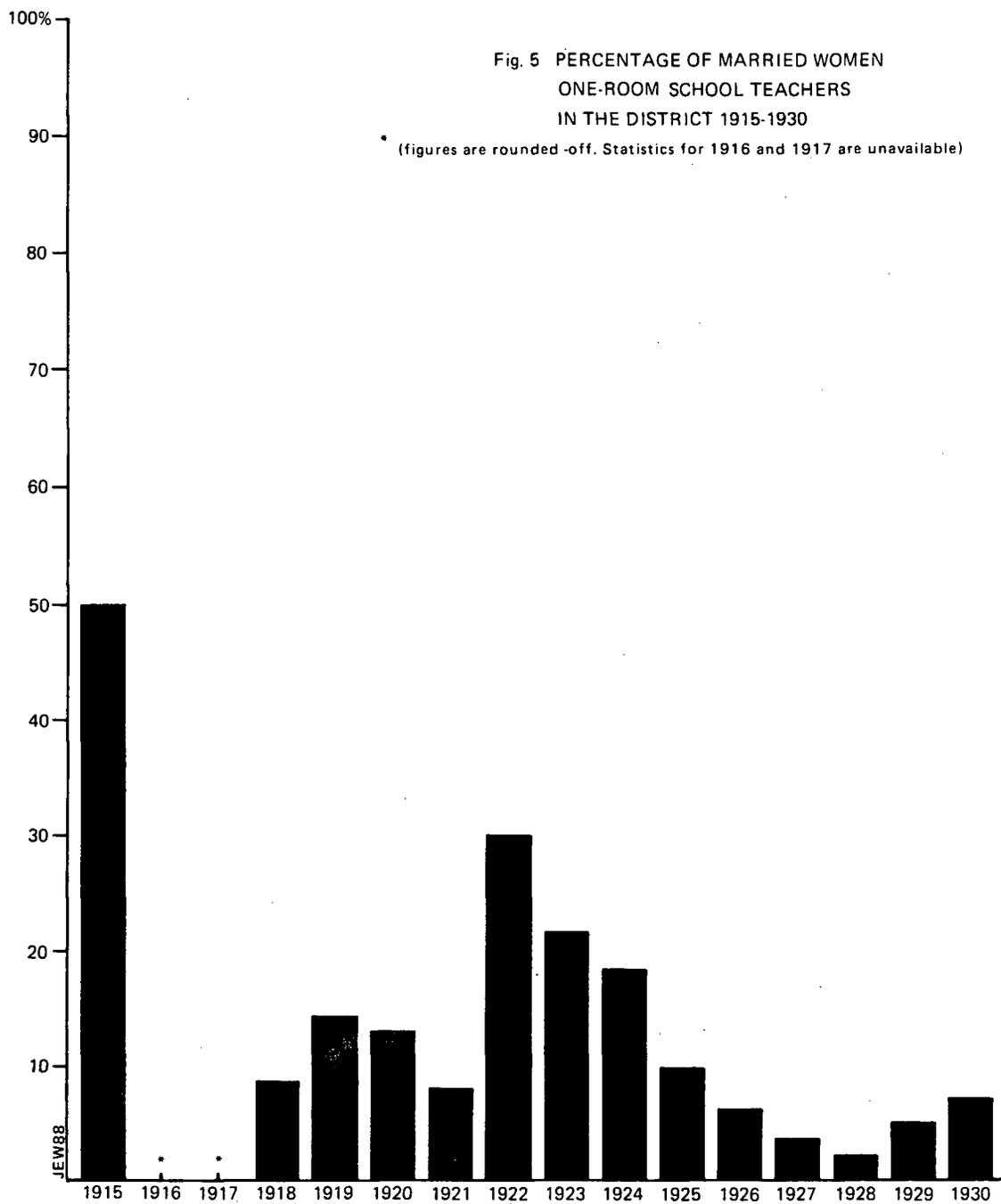
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<sup>15</sup>According to the McQuillan Diary, mice infested her room, coyotes roamed the countryside, she was threatened by a vicious wild dog, and one day she "thought I heard a fierce beast on way home so I hit the trail pretty hard--Oh how I wish I were home."

<sup>16</sup>Bowron Reports, 1928-1932.

<sup>17</sup>Annual Report, 1924, p. T58.

<sup>18</sup>This appears to be a province-wide trend in assisted schools as in 1926 the proportion of women teachers rose from 81.5 percent to 83.5 percent in 1930 and those teachers who were single also climbed from 91.3 percent to 92.5 percent during the same period. As well, between 1926-1930 in all of the province's assisted schools the proportion of women teachers who were married dropped from 8.8 percent to 7.5 percent. Both percentages were slightly higher than those for the one-room school teachers in this district.





less educated than other assisted school teachers. Of the district's one-room school teachers, 2.1 percent held an academic certificate, 22.9 percent had first class qualifications,<sup>19</sup> as opposed to 3.1 percent and 26.3 percent respectively for all of British Columbia's assisted school teachers.<sup>20</sup> This may have been an indication that because of the frontier nature of the district's communities and being so far from major urban centres, most of the higher-qualified teachers sought employment elsewhere. Thus, in the district, although statistics show fewer women teachers, fewer married women teachers, and teachers with slightly less academic credentials, the teachers' specifications can be seen as roughly representative of the rest of the province.<sup>21</sup>

Between 1915-1930, omitting those teachers who left the one-room schools because the schools closed (28 teachers or 4.8 percent of the district's total), the average amount of time a teacher stayed in any one of these schools was only 1.28 years. In other words, assuming an eight month academic year, if a teacher started teaching in a school on 1 September 1920, for example, the possibility that she would still be teaching there after 7 November 1921 becomes less than half. Recorded in the Putman-Weir Report for 1925, the figure for the rural and assisted school teachers throughout the province was 1.62 years<sup>22</sup> or given the same scenario on the average the teacher would be employed until 28 January 1922.

Up to 1930, the district inspectors, G.H. Gower and W.G. Gamble of Prince George, and H.C. Fraser of Prince Rupert referred to teacher transiency almost exclusively in

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<sup>19</sup>Note that the combined figures for teachers who had academic or first class certificates in 1926-25 percent--was lower than the 1924 combined proportion of 27 percent. This was a slight aberration to the seven years (1924-1930) of increased teachers' qualifications.

<sup>20</sup>Teaching qualifications for all of the province's one-room school teachers (as opposed to assisted school teachers) are currently unavailable. A description of the education required for each teaching certificate can be found in Chapter I.

<sup>21</sup>All preceding figures were calculated from the Statistical Tables. Unfortunately, the ages of the teachers are unavailable.

<sup>22</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 188.

terms of its decline.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, in 1921, of all the one-room school teachers in the area, 92 percent did not return to the schools they had taught in the year before--a decade high--and the turnover rate declined to 70 percent in 1926, rising slightly to rest at 76 percent in 1930. In that same year approximately three out of four schools had a new teacher. This was significant because the pupils and community of each school were forced to readjust to such change, as were the inspectors when their specific pedagogical advice based on the goal of long-term academic efficiency in each schoolhouse was constantly undermined by unsettling teacher discontinuity.<sup>24</sup>

Between 1915-1930, 11.7 percent of all the transient teachers in these one-room schools transferred to at least one other school in the district. It was hoped that by tracing the travels of this group of teachers a pattern might be uncovered as to the reasons why a teacher vacated a one-room school for another. No such pattern was discernible. Teacher transiency seemed quite arbitrary. Some teachers left a school for a post just a few miles away while over a summer other teachers travelled from one end of the district to the other. In an extreme example, in 1919 Miss E.M. Law transferred from Chilco east of Vanderhoof to the smaller Copper City school near Terrace several hundred miles away. Other examples are indicative of the numerous mobile teachers who crisscrossed the countryside: Mrs. Muriel Donovan went from Engen school, a few miles east to Braeside, back to Engen, to nearby Bear Head, then back to Engen all in a span of ten years, while between 1926-1929 Miss Marjory D. Jacquot travelled from Evelyn school by Smithers down to Usk on the Skeena River, then back north ninety miles to New Hazelton. Loretta Chisholme lost \$40 annually when she moved from Tatalrose in 1924 south to Wistaria in 1925--while most other transient teachers'

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<sup>23</sup>See the Annual Report, 1923, pp. F39-40; 1924, p. T58; 1925, p. M39; 1926, p. R41; and 1927, p. M41.

<sup>24</sup>All preceding figures calculated from the Statistical Tables.

salaries remained the same from one school to the next. Significantly, when considering the mobility of all the teachers, 19 of a total of 57 transfers entailed a move to a school with a smaller enrolment (4 were to schools of the same size), and again 19 of the transfers were to schools with a smaller operating budget (2 went to schools with identical budgets).<sup>25</sup> Thus, while the majority of transfers reflected the general trend in the province of teachers who moved to larger, wealthier schools, the figures also indicated other personal and more capricious motives at work.

The reasons why a teacher left a one-room school remain largely unknown. In 1927 Miss Alice Smith left Omineca School in Rose Lake, a relatively stable farming and tie-hacking community, to teach in Glentanna School near Smithers. Mrs. Steele (née Smith) recalls that she did not enjoy teaching in Rose Lake (although she could not ascertain why), and is still puzzled by the fact that the teacher who replaced her and with whom she was friends, Miss S. Mildred McDonald, liked working in Omineca School and stayed there for over two years.<sup>26</sup> Mildred McQuillan took an immediate dislike to Orange Valley School by Fraser Lake, a struggling farming and tie-hacking settlement, and was prepared to leave only two days into her employment.<sup>27</sup> In "simple but not luxurious" Topley where "no one is really starving to death," Allan McLuckie found himself "disappointed in his position and not at all interested in his work" for reasons unknown to the inspector,<sup>28</sup> and in Lily Lake twelve miles south of Fort Fraser Miss Kathleen V. Munday resigned "apparently for no good reason...and proposes to

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<sup>25</sup>Five transfers which were a result of school closures and one school with insufficient information were not included in these calculations, the figures compiled from the Statistical Tables.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with Mrs. George A. Steele, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver B.C., 13 November 1987.

<sup>27</sup>McQuillan Diary, 1927.

<sup>28</sup>Bureau Records, 1928, and Inspectors' Reports, 1927.

leave the district at Easter."<sup>29</sup> In Dorreen, a tiny well-attended school on the Skeena River, Miss Mina V. Deane was "much more at home in an ungraded school like this than she was in a graded room in Prince Rupert," while paradoxically one year later in 1929 the new teacher, Miss Kathleen A. Moxham "is not remaining in this school next term....She is anxious to have a more responsible position in a larger school."<sup>30</sup> Despite being an extremely poor railway stop/tie-hacking/agricultural community with internal political divisions, Engen School posted throughout the 1920s one of the lowest teacher transiency rates in the district--1.44 years; the district record for teacher retainability was in Woodcock, an impoverished mountainous farm and mining settlement south of Hazelton surrounded by Indian villages and populated by just three families. Here Miss Helen M. Hibberd worked for five years even though she boarded one year with a railway construction gang. On the other hand, some higher transiency rates were recorded in relatively large, stable schools in financially secure communities such as Burns Lake and Ellesby, a satellite of Vanderhoof.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, a look at the district between Terrace and Vanderhoof forces a consideration of teacher transiency on an individual level. The provincial pattern of the one-room school teacher who moved to more prosperous working conditions (see Chapter I) has exceptions in that a minority of teachers transferred or chose to remain in what appeared to be decrepit surroundings for reasons other than career advancement. No doubt the hardship and loneliness was enough to drive some teachers away from a school,<sup>32</sup> but unfortunately specific evidence which relates community conditions and teacher

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<sup>29</sup>Inspectors' Reports, 1927.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 1928 and 1929.

<sup>31</sup>The transiency rates for both schools was only one year. Figures calculated from the Statistical Tables.

<sup>32</sup>See Chapter I for a brief discussion of forlorn teachers who left remote communities for ones with better marriage markets.

preferences to teacher mobility is sparse indeed.

This caprice in the teachers' individual motives had a counterpart in material conditions: essentially, each one-room school was unique. Exploring beyond the generalizations in one-room school conditions put forth in Chapters I and II, it will be seen that differences in circumstance among the schools between Terrace and Vanderhoof made one-room school teaching an extremely personal experience. To examine further the schools in this context, both the conditions in which the teacher lived and worked have to be considered. Thus, still to be discussed are the schools' pedagogical and physical conditions as influenced by community settlement, transiency, and poverty; and the local politics which helped determine the nature of local initiative in school affairs while at times promoting great social disharmony in the communities.

### **The Schools**

From the beginning, in the newly-settled areas of the district some pupils were backward and overage because the one-room schools were extending educational opportunity to frontier settlements which previously had no such formal institution.<sup>33</sup> Retardation statistics are not available for the schools in this district but figures for pupil attendance may indicate a form of academic underachievement. Between 1927-1930 the average attendance rate for the one-room assisted schools in the district was almost exactly the same as the rate for provincial assisted schools, 83.1 percent versus 83.0

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<sup>33</sup>For examples of Inspectors' Reports of the schools in the district with retarded pupils "as expected," see Fort St. James, 1922; Bear Head, 1921; Lily Lake 1927; Marten Lake, 1927, and Sheraton, 1926; and Nadina River, 1928.

percent respectively,<sup>34</sup> but the rate was 4.2 percent less than the provincial average for all rural and assisted schools.<sup>35</sup> The inspectors considered attendance an important factor for schoolhouse success. In 1930, even in Perow, a small farming and tie-hacking community with one of the best over-all attendance rates in the entire district, Inspector Fraser recorded that "the progress of the pupils has been greatly retarded on account of loss of time" through poor attendance.<sup>36</sup> Four miles from Quick, the school in Round Lake was centrally-located in an extremely scattered, predominantly agricultural area, and was one of the largest schools in the district but also one of the most poorly attended. In his September, 1922 report Fraser wrote

Poorest attendance in the whole Inspectorate....Miss Davis is doing conscientious work but the parents are giving neither teacher nor pupils a fair chance....[Last year] pupil making highest attendance lost over three weeks. The two next highest...both lost seven and one half weeks and fifteen weeks respectively. No marvel that not a single entrance pupil passed. When it is remembered that all other pupils lost more time than these three, no one can attach blame to the teacher.<sup>37</sup>

Also a problem with other one-room schools in the province, inclement weather which blocked already poor roads, and distances from home to school were common impediments to pupil attendance. Between Fort Fraser and Vanderhoof, Engen was a railway maintenance stop but also centre for a large, scattered farming and tie-hacking community. In 1928 Miss Elsie Arland wrote in the Bureau Records that "Attendance is good...unless the freezing or thawing of the Nechako [River] prevents 4 children from

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<sup>34</sup>See the 1931 Census, XII, pp. 668-669 for a good graphic representation of census district school attendance throughout Canada.

<sup>35</sup>Based on figures calculated from the Statistical Tables.

<sup>36</sup>Inspectors' Reports, 1930.

<sup>37</sup>Several other schools reported pupil retardation on account of poor attendance. See especially the Inspectors' Reports for Francois Lake (1923-1925), and Nithi River south of Endako, where 2 of 7 students "do not attend sufficiently regularly to make good progress possible. Only two other students were up to standards for their grades."

attending. Severe cold has also kept at home 3 children who live 4 miles away." During the 1920s attendance in Engen School was uncertain as land clearing preceded throughout the countryside which drove families further away from the school which was situated only one-quarter mile from the railway.<sup>38</sup> Grassy Plains, a small community between Francois and Ootsa Lakes where the permanent residents were mixed-farmers and ranchers living several miles apart, was so constantly handicapped by weather and road conditions as well as contagious illness that its school was closed three times in the 1920s on account of poor attendance. In September 1927 Inspector Fraser wrote that "After being closed 3 years this school has been re-opened. Of the 11 pupils available 3 are not yet enrolled owing to whooping cough and a fourth is too far away to come alone."

The effects of illness--several times throughout the decade inspectors commented on the disabling effects of skin disease, whooping cough, chicken pox, and the measles on attendance and on keeping the schools open<sup>39</sup> --was only one factor associated with the problem of schooling in scattered communities. In the district throughout the 1920s, the trend of opening schools in the wilderness to bring education to nearby settlers created a host of small, poorly kept schools which were at times not easily accessible. For example, between 1920-1923 when Fort Fraser's school enrolment increased from 16 to 28 and school trustees contemplating a building expansion, a log cabin school was constructed nine miles north across the Nechako River in Fort Fraser North to service a minute enrolment of seven pupils. (The school was closed in 1928). Here, as well as ten

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<sup>38</sup>See the Inspectors' Reports and the Bureau Records for Engen as well as McQuillan Diary for good descriptions of the communities in which the residents lived miles apart.

<sup>39</sup>The effect of illness on attendance was also recorded at least once in the 1920s in Alexander Manson, Tchesinkut Lake, and Nithi River; Bear Head and Streatham; Evelyn; Topley where in 1926 "on account of colds one half of the pupils were absent." Consequently, the chronically poor attendance made the schoolhouse "plenty big enough." (Bureau Records, 1928); Omineca where the school's opening was delayed because of whooping cough among the children in 1927; Bulkley South, and Quick; Kitwanga; and Copper City.

miles west in Fraser Lake and teacher transient Fraser Lake North, the school district was not centralizing but actually expanding outward into the wilderness. Tiny schools proliferated into the hinterland north and south of Smithers as well as down the wagon trails between Burns Lake and Wistaria. Isolated schools were forced to fend for themselves far from modern conveniences. More remote areas presented difficulties for delivery of government services such as police, road construction and maintenance, and health care. Indeed, even on a major transportation network, in Houston during the 1920s "the greatest felt lack of this community...has been its medical services, and a most deplorable fact it is, that there never was a clinic, First Aid Station, or even doctor to render temporary attention and comfort to unfortunate people who so often required it....People were so frightened of the flu! It was a dreadful scourge!"<sup>40</sup>

To the inspectors, one-room schools in the wilderness presented certain problems of organization. As schools expanded into less developed areas their financial base became increasingly precarious. In addition, uncertain transportation routes to these schools often made for an extremely arduous journey for the inspector. Consolidation seemed to be the answer. Closing remote schools and amalgamating them with more accessible ones, and centralizing the administration of the school district through the elimination of tiny school boards was tried as an experiment in 1924 when the pupils of Nechako School were transported by bus over extremely poor roads to Vanderhoof multi-roomed school. Although a success--for example some problems with attendance and schoolhouse upkeep were eliminated--this remained the only example of consolidation in the district well into the 1930s.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Houston Centennial Committee, "Marks on the Forest Floor: A Story of Houston, B.C.," Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C., 1971, pp. 49, 61.

<sup>41</sup>See Hancock, Vanderhoof, pp. 125-130.

The transient as well as scattered nature of the settlements affected schools in a way beyond the control of the inspectors or teachers. For example, in Colleymount, a small highly transient community of trappers and prospectors on Francois Lake, even before the schoolhouse was completed, the school closed in 1922 for seven years because no children were left in the district.<sup>42</sup> Opened in 1920 to serve a tiny enrolment of three girls, North Bulkley School closed four years later when the children from a large family engaged in cutting ties at a distant camp failed to return in the spring. Several times Inspector Fraser suggested that this school should be closed and amalgamated with Perow, only a few miles distant, but once closed no corresponding jump in attendance was recorded in Perow, nor in nearby Houston or Topley. Where did the pupils go? Less of a mystery was the ongoing pupil exchange between Decker Lake and Palling. Both schools suffered from high enrolment fluctuations when in the winter Palling lost families to the tie-camps nearer to Decker Lake, only ten miles away. Once the tie-cutting season was over Palling's school attendance would again jump while Decker Lake school registered a concomitant decrease.<sup>43</sup>

In highly transient communities such as those dependent on sawmills or mines, or engaged in seasonal tie-hacking, the teacher was always working under the spectre of possible school closure.<sup>44</sup> As well, in communities with a large proportion of transient

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<sup>42</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 229-235.

<sup>43</sup>See the Inspectors' Reports and the Bureau Records for both communities, as well as Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 166-181.

<sup>44</sup>Some inspectors and teachers would try to monitor the local population in the hopes of predicting the school's future. In pioneer Bear Head, just six miles south of Engen, Mrs. Wilhelmina Hannah in the 1923 Bureau Records was resigned to the fact that "Only 3 families have remained in the district; As yet little progress has been made...." In January 1925 the school closed. South of Kitwanga in Cedarvale, the school closed for three years when the lumbering operations ceased. In November 1922 Inspector Fraser lamented that "another family is moving away....School will likely have to be closed." The school opened again in 1926 to children of prospectors and trappers but attendance remained a problem. In 1928 Miss Lilian Moore wrote in the Bureau Records that "I had 4 divisions until Christmas. 2 pupils left for winter. Another has gone trapping until May." Radical fluctuations in attendance accompanied such communities, as in unproductive Duthie Mines the number of pupils who attended the school went from 19 to 21 in 1929, then fell abruptly to 9 in 1930. The school

members the teacher often taught unfamiliar faces because, according to the inspectors, many schools were comprised of "pupils from various districts." Of those schools so deemed most were on the major transportation routes. Decker Lake, Topley, Houston, and Hanall were all railway stops and except for Hanall were large tie-hacking communities. Tchesinkut Lake was a meeting place for those travelling between the isolated south Lake district and Burns Lake,<sup>45</sup> and Alexander Manson, the school farthest south in the district, had an assorted school population which reflected its importance as a remote school for families of trappers, prospectors, and landseekers.

Common to almost all of the transient or stable communities in the district (and throughout the province) was impoverishment. By virtue of their "floating" populations, economic instability, scattered settlement pattern, or isolation, these communities carried on frontier living well into the 1930s. The repercussions of insolvency were enormous. Often school attendance was affected by the pupil's value as an extra worker on the homestead or additional source of family income. Children in these small communities were considered units of labour. Extra hands in helping to bring in a harvest, clear land, or work in a sawmill were considered invaluable to the financially-strapped settler. As a result, school attendance fell prey to the struggle for family solvency.<sup>46</sup> Thus, for example, in the winter some Francois Lake settlers would cut pine trees and haul them to the frozen lake where the timber later was hauled to a local sawmill for processing;

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<sup>44</sup>[continued] closed that same year. See the Statistical Tables.

<sup>45</sup>See the South Side Centennial Committee, "Story of a North-Central Settlement," 1959; and Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup>The schoolable child whose tendency to forsake formal education for labouring on the homestead or earning a few dollars a week (if lucky) at the local mine or sawmill is discussed in two Ontario studies: In Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict, Gaffield found that school enrolment among labourers' and farmers' children was "especially limited" in 1880s Prescott County, (pp. 124-126); and in an in-depth look at school enrolment and attendance in several Ontario counties in the late nineteenth century, Ian E. Davey in "The Rythm of Work and the Rythm of School," in Egerton Ryerson and His Times, eds. Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton (Toronto: McMillan, 1978), pp. 221-253, found that in rural areas school attendance was contingent on the fact that the child was too young to contribute to the family's income or that work was not available for the young labourer.

because the children had to "help out with the bay," attendance at the local school was one of the lowest in the district.<sup>47</sup> Just south of Smithers in Telkwa, throughout the 1920s school attendance was also poor. At this railway flag stop and centre for trappers, miners, and tie-hackers, the majority of the large proportion of farmers in the population were "badly off...attendance poor as farmers keep out boys to help on farms--unable to engage help." Alfred J. Clotworthy contended in the 1928 Bureau Records that the inflated prices of the food and rent in the community made for difficult living, and contradicting the logic to be espoused a year later by Lottie Bowron, cautioned unwisely, "Salary far too low for a married man--only single teachers should be sent here." In the rolling hilly meadows of Tchesinkut Lake, a community mostly engaged in relatively low-labour intensive ranching of sheep and horses with little tie-hacking nearby, in 1923 school attendance was near perfect because "the school is the only interest the children have...."<sup>48</sup>

Several unexplained truancies sent inspectors scrambling to quote verbatim Section 159 of the Public Schools Act regarding parental responsibility for education,<sup>49</sup> but at least one truancy could be explained by community poverty. Although its school had one of the largest enrolments and operating budgets in the entire district, according to McQuillan's diary, Orange Valley, only two miles from the railway stop of Engen, was a picture of isolation and poverty. The trapping and tie-hacking settlement was a collection of shacks along a long dirt trail, the school was a one-room log cabin and McQuillan lived in part of a resident's house, her bedroom cordoned off by a tattered

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<sup>47</sup>Inspectors' Reports, October 1921.

<sup>48</sup>Bureau Records, March 1923. History of Tchesinkut Lake region is contained in Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 151-155.

<sup>49</sup>For example, see the Inspectors' Reports for Tintagel, Driftwood Creek, and Round Lake for 1925; and Evelyn and Francois Lake South for 1927. The Public Schools Act is contained in the Office of the Provincial Secretary, The Revised Statutes of British Columbia, III (Victoria, B.C.), 1924.

curtain. On one occasion a local settler visited her for dinner and left with a tin of flour "to save from starvation." The children of one family did not attend school "for they had not a thing for lunch--starving" while another pupil regularly came to school in icy weather without stockings. As well, one day "August Newman [was] away from school this A.M.. I asked Cecil his brother where he was and this was his reply '--eh--a--a--a--August had to stay home cause he had a hole in his p--p--p--pants.'"

While school administrators in Victoria seemingly failed to see the serious attendance problems characteristic of community impoverishment, they did not entirely neglect the reality of local insolvency. According to the Public Schools Act, in assisted school districts the teacher's salary was to be paid by the Minister of Finance and the cost of the erection of the schoolhouse was to be defrayed by the Provincial Treasury.<sup>50</sup> In assisted school districts without local assessment (as between 1915-1930 in the area from Terrace to Vanderhoof one quarter of all schools were classified) "the building in which the public school is held, as well as the furnishings and the incidental expenses in connection with the maintenance of the school shall be provided by the voluntary contribution of parents and others interested..."<sup>51</sup> In assisted school districts with local assessment a property tax was levied on the residents according to the school's particular needs, subject to the approval of the provincial assessor. The money raised was to be used to supplement the work of the voluntary labour necessary to construct and maintain the school.<sup>52</sup> Neither condition, however, offered a common basis for support among the assisted one-room schools in the district. Between 1918-1930 the average contribution paid by the communities with tax assessment was only \$221.57 with a recorded low of \$13.10 put forth by Fort Fraser in 1919 and a high of \$1,239.07

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 1924, Chapter 226, Sections 25, 31.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., Chapter 226, Section 110.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., Chapter 226, Section 113, 199-122.

paid by the residents of Quick in 1922.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the district various amounts of money were at the school trustees' disposal each year and considering the local economies such as in Francois Lake South where goods were exorbitantly expensive<sup>54</sup> as opposed to an almost barter form of exchange in Hanall, ten miles north of Usk, as well as the sometimes total dependence of each school on volunteer enthusiasm, the Public Schools Act itself can be seen to have ensured variety in teachers' working conditions. The Act offered a financial base on which to establish a school and hire a teacher but left the future of the school in the hands of local material constraints and personal idiosyncracies.

As a result, schoolhouse conditions varied enormously in quality. Copper City's school was "crude," a small frame building with broken windows and no toilets which prompted Inspector Fraser to advocate finally in 1929 the erection of a new building. In "pioneer" Decker Lake where extreme temperatures meant -50 degrees F on some winter days, the log school was "in need of great improvement," in particular for the holes in its walls.<sup>55</sup> Nithi River, an isolated farm and tie-hacking community south of Endako, was constantly harangued by the inspector for unimproved school conditions which saw a "fair-sized" frame building with a classroom that was bare, dirty, "unattractive," and with holes in its walls.<sup>56</sup> Although only two miles from Vanderhoof with the people responsible for schoolhouse maintenance being "interested in the school," poorly attended Nechako school was in a constant state of distress. In 1921 Inspector Gower wrote that the school had no ventilation, a dirty room and no water. Two years later the Bureau Records anonymously recorded that the "Building is a small one.

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<sup>53</sup>The average operating budget (which included the teacher's salary) for all the one-room schools in the district was \$1,179.49. All figures calculated from the Statistical Tables.

<sup>54</sup>Bureau Records, 1923.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 1923, 1928, and see the 1925 Inspectors' Reports for Decker Lake School.

<sup>56</sup>Inspectors' Reports, 1920, 1921, 1923, and 1926.

Draughty. Ceiling too low...grounds unimproved....School is not well equipped." In frontier ranching, farming, and trapping Wistaria on Ootsa Lake, the school was held in an overcrowded old log house until it was destroyed by fire in 1924 and although the equipment was adequate the flag had to be protected against rats.<sup>57</sup> Seven miles from New Hazelton in a large ranching district, Pratt's new log school building was comfortable enough but in 1923 the teacher Matthew Buckpitt wrote "School grounds very rough and stony on bank of creek which freezes up and runs all over school grounds at first cold snap in winter." Numerous other schools were in poor condition, had "rough" and "unimproved" grounds, and were held in various types of buildings such as an Anglican Church, vacant house, government road building, and local hotel.<sup>58</sup>

Other communities provided fine school buildings and sometimes, significantly, in extremely impoverished areas. Despite its isolation and dependency on trapping and small farming, in 1923 Fort St. James erected a large, well lit and ventilated comfortable frame building with a painted porch, papered classroom and closet space. Even the grounds were cleared which prompted Gower to write in 1925 that "the school property is a credit to the district." Another school similarly described was in Palling, a railway flag stop north of Burns Lake. Built in 1922 in a natural clearing with spring water nearby, the new, lined log school with large fenced grounds proved to be "one of the best small schools in this inspectorate" despite a tiny enrolment and highly transient community members comprised predominantly of tie-hackers.<sup>59</sup> Uncha Valley,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 1923.

<sup>58</sup>As examples, see McQuillan Diary for her description of Orange Valley School as the "cell"; and the Bureau Records and Inspectors' Reports for: Engen, when in 1920 the school was held in a room in a nearby hotel; Fort Fraser, where "A small frame building...is used as a schoolhouse in this district. 36 children are crowded in a class-room that is suitable for about half that number. A new building is long overdue." (Inspectors' Reports, 1925); Fraser Lake: "The building in which this school is held is not fit for human habitation." (Inspectors' Reports, 1922); and North Bulkley which had a short-lived "primitive" school with unfenced grounds on a riverbank.

<sup>59</sup>Palling school served as a church as well. See the Inspectors' Reports 1923, the Bureau

south-east of Southbank was a struggling farming and trapping community but one which "takes a deep interest in the affairs of the school" with corresponding results: a large, clean and well-lit school equipped to the hilt with a library which in 1929 contained over two hundred volumes.<sup>60</sup> Schoolhouse conditions varied considerably just miles apart. For example, while only nine miles north into the wilderness of one of the worst schoolhouses in the district, in 1923 Fort Fraser North School was "creditable," according to Gower, newly painted, clean, with good light and ventilation. Other schools in the district were lauded for their most satisfactory condition.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, while settlement patterns, transiency, and poverty of each community affected in certain degrees schoolhouse conditions as well as school enrolment and attendance, a most significant factor of variability in teaching conditions among one-room schools in the district was local politics driven by the whims and caprice of people enclosed in an isolated community. Local social interaction, of which community initiative and support for schooling was a part, ensured different and frequently trying teaching experiences from one school to the next.

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<sup>59</sup>[continued] Records 1923, 1928, and Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 176-181.

<sup>60</sup>Inspectors' Reports, 1926. Establishing school libraries was dependent entirely on local interests. According to the Public Schools Act, Chapter 226, Section 27, the Council of Public Instruction would match any contribution of \$50 or under made by the community toward the institution of a school library.

<sup>61</sup>As examples, see the Bureau Records and Inspectors' Reports for: Willowvale; Endako where continuous improvements made this school "a credit to the district," (Inspectors' Reports, 1927); Perow which had "one of the neatest and best school buildings in the valley" (Inspectors' Reports, 1927); and Dorreen: "Grounds have been cleared so as to leave several nice clumps of white birches and a few lone pines; the result is quite artistic." (Inspectors' Reports, 1928).

## Community Politics

Local politics refers to the nuances in interpersonal relations and material conditions brought about by small groups of people interacting within a geographically-constricted area. Throughout the 1920s the settlements between Terrace and Vanderhoof were outstanding examples in British Columbia of enclosed communities impervious to any constant outside economic or social influence, such as that experienced by those areas affected by urban encroachment or engulfed by the sudden economic superiority of a nearby town. Here, because the communication and transportation networks were extremely unreliable and the nature of the local economies de-emphasized any importance of inter-community trade, each settlement became a separate society made distinct by such factors as unique social composition and personal interests. As a result, each community resembled a clique of sorts which inevitably forced the teacher to adapt to its priorities.

As discussed previously, the lack of checks built into the Public Schools Act for the maintenance of remote schools created a wide variety of school conditions. As well, it let loose the full capriciousness of community initiative in various degrees. For example, in 1922 the people of farming and tie-hacking Willowvale south of Fort Fraser "have shown a very commendable degree of courage and enterprise in erecting a new building so soon after the loss [by fire] of their first schoolhouse. The present schoolhouse is a neat frame building..." while in Francois Lake the transient prospectors, trappers, and tie-hackers took from 1920 to 1926 to construct a medium-sized frame school despite an abundance of materials nearby.<sup>62</sup> Some small, isolated but "progressive" communities had residents

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<sup>62</sup>See the Inspectors' Reports in 1923 for Willowvale and 1920-1926 for Francois Lake.

who would "do anything for the benefit of the teacher"<sup>63</sup> whereby they organized "building bees" of volunteers who gathered to construct the school,<sup>64</sup> or held basket socials where lunches prepared by the teachers were auctioned, with the money collected treated as donations towards the upkeep of the local school.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, several communities demonstrated a clear lack of support for the school. Tiny Glentanna School, a log house in the sparsely-settled farming and prospecting community eight miles from Smithers, suffered from chronically poor attendance and the school had to be closed for a year "on account of misunderstanding in the district."<sup>66</sup> Decker Lake settlers took three years to clear a playground for the school, and in 1928 the parents of eight children in Francois Lake South refused to send the children to school for unspecified reasons while the delapidated school building was finally abandoned after three years of inspector recommendations for massive improvements.<sup>67</sup> In 1929 Inspector Fraser reported from impoverished Usk north of Copper City that "The desks...at present not in use...are being broken badly and the maps are carelessly used. Whether this is due to present conditions or from last year I cannot say, but [the] pupils have been warned against this wanton destruction of school property."

Certainly not to be overlooked as a factor in the variety of school conditions was the unique climate of community initiative for school affairs. Essentially, school support was unpredictable because the isolated societies were based on weak social hierarchies. By their nature subsistence communities had no traditional route to individual local power.

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<sup>63</sup>Bureau Records, Uncha Valley, 1923. For schools supported by similarly cooperative settlers see the Bureau Records and the Inspectors' Reports for Fort Fraser North, Sheraton, Palling, and teacher-stable Driftwood Creek. Also see Turkki, Burns Lake for Omineca in Rose Lake, p. 181.

<sup>64</sup>For example, see Turkki, Burns Lake, pp. 184-190 for Bulkley South School.

<sup>65</sup>See Evelyn School's basket social in Shephard, "History of Schools," Provincial Archives, 1971.

<sup>66</sup>Inspectors' Reports, 1925.

<sup>67</sup>See ibid., 1920-1923 for both schools.

Very limited opportunities existed to accumulate financial resources: each settler was more or less on a similar economic plane. Tie-hackers, farmers, trappers, and prospectors all had a common basis of economic struggle. Social position was dependent on personal criteria. Decreased social range created "a weaker sense of the social whole...a stronger sense of the individual"<sup>68</sup> than in the more urban regions of the province. Ultimately school policy was relegated to personal interests. Putman and Weir were particularly fearful for this situation. In 1925 they wrote

Petty local jealousies...retard school progress in rural areas. A brief digression by way of illustration may be justifiable here. A proposed consolidation, undoubtedly advisable from an educational viewpoint was defeated in a small centre in the northern part of the Province because a trustee was at odds with his business rival, who was the prime mover in the consolidation project....This spurious brand of democracy...should receive a well-merited rebuke....The action of this trustee is in reality anti-democratic....This case is by no means an isolated one.<sup>69</sup>

The local school board's powers were extensive. Its duty was to assess the community for possible taxation, supervise the building of the school and acquire its equipment, select the site of the schoolhouse through community consensus, provide health inspection for the pupils, and hire and fire the teacher.<sup>70</sup> Enough autocratic school boards who did not seem to have the local school's best interests at heart existed throughout the province, however, that the Putman-Weir Report advocated "in cases of petty obstruction" for the inspector to be the final authority in assisted school policy decisions.<sup>71</sup> As well, throughout the 1920s Official Trustees, or "O.T.'s" were used with increased frequency to administer local school affairs. An "O.T." was appointed by the

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<sup>68</sup>Cole Harris, "Reflections on the Surface of a Pond: A Review Article," B.C. Studies no. 49 (Spring 1981): 92.

<sup>69</sup>Putman-Weir Report, pp. 124-125.

<sup>70</sup>Revised Statutes, Chapter 226, Sections 102, 133.

<sup>71</sup>Putman-Weir Report, p. 125.

Council of Public Instruction to replace the entire school board in some districts so that he may "exercise every power and function which under this Act might otherwise lawfully be had and exercised by qualified voters [and] Board of School Trustees." <sup>72</sup>

In many settlements in the district trustees were probably elected on some basis of prestige derived from personal characteristics, or given the minute size of some of the communities and since no record of campaigning or electoral disputes seem to exist, the prospective trustee may merely have had to volunteer for the job. Interestingly, several school boards had a founding settler as a member which may have indicated that a route to power was not in dollars or land but seniority.<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, the Board was a representative of the local people, not an official body of the Department of Education, and as a result was subject to the economic-egalitarian forces which shaped the local society where one voice was equal to the next. Differences in individual power and right were vague at best; thus, disputes within and without the school board were rife and major issues were often settled by conflict.

In these isolated and intimate communities personal and family problems became community concerns. Social schisms frequently erupted. In Grassy Plains, a community twenty-five miles south of Burns Lake populated by tie-hackers, prospectors, and subsistence mixed-farmers and ranchers, "Few hillbilly type feuds of short duration began because the stock bulls often got loose and wandered the range. The arguments as

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<sup>72</sup>Revised Statutes, Chapter 226, Section 156. Official Trustees did not seem to be part of any overt policy of the Department of Education. They were installed rather arbitrarily, only in regions of obvious local problems with school administration. As discussed in Chapter II, for example, the Cowichan Lake School Board was replaced with an "O.T." immediately after the suicide of Mabel Jones.

<sup>73</sup>Many local histories remark on the integral role of the first settlers who shaped local school policy. See especially Turkki, *Burns Lake for South Bulkley School*, p. 184; *Colleymount School*, pp. 229-240; and *Grassy Plains*, pp. 249-260; for Palling and Southbank schools see the South Side Centennial Committee, "Story of a North-Central Settlement," Provincial Archives; and see Shephard, "History of Schools," Provincial Archives, for Round Lake School.

to whose bull had been where were often hot and heavy."<sup>74</sup> Occasionally selecting a school site was an explosive affair. To stem a community fight, a resident in Decker Lake obtained a land map, plotted the homes of the families whose children were attending school and pin-pointed the centre of the area encompassed by the homes.<sup>75</sup> The situation in Orange Valley was more intense as divisions in the society of the scattered settlement were manifest when the school was burned down twice in the early 1920s ostensibly because some residents were dissatisfied with its location. In October 1927 McQuillan sensed that the autumn school meeting was to be a "great event" because of the issue at stake. At the meeting a new school site was selected closer to the centre of the settlement but still inter-family acrimony lingered. One resident was "a little huffy over [the] situation," another visited her "raising cane about school-site," and "old farmers" were incessantly "grouching" over the selection. Eventually the site was officially recognized by a petition to the Official Trustee but settler disputes remained.<sup>76</sup> In Palling, a railway flag stop north of Burns Lake, a dispute at an annual meeting "developed into rowdy discussion and from there into a free fight in which ratepayers became involved."<sup>77</sup> On numerous occasions community disputes directly involved the teacher. Mrs. Alice Steele (née Smith) recalled the problems created in Rose Lake north of Palling which she felt were representative of other isolated settlements where two factions split the community in half with two or three families on each side. If the teacher had dinner in one house, in order to keep peace in the community she had to accept an invitation at the neighbours'. She could not date just one local boy without being branded as playing favorites. The first thing she learned

<sup>74</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 264.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>76</sup>See McQuillan Diary, 1927.

<sup>77</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 181.

when she taught in remote communities was diplomacy: "Don't gossip, and don't say one thing about one family to another."<sup>78</sup>

In some areas diplomacy was ineffective. In her reports Lottie Bowron frequently alluded to outright community antipathy towards the teacher. Although "the fact that [the teacher] had (in most cases) immediate ties with the far away cities clothed them with an aura of mystery and sophistication that fascinated and enslaved their rustic pupils,"<sup>79</sup> this was not a reverence as prevalently shared by the parents or other settlers in the community. Often the teacher was treated like a second class citizen, a foreigner subservient to the demands and standards of the community. The settlers seemed to have regarded the teacher as a labourer over whom they could rightfully dictate. This prerogative was supported by the fact that the community initiated the establishment of the school in the first place when it petitioned the government, and the school board was given absolute power (barring appeal) to hire or fire the teacher as it saw fit. Animosity toward the teacher was common when at times she must have exuded an almost alien urban presence, an academic in an overwhelmingly working class milieu. As a result the teacher was particularly susceptible to an inordinate amount of criticism. For example, in 1930 Lottie Bowron was summoned by Miss Gwendolyn Lang, the teacher in Engen, a community of predominantly transient tie-hackers and subsistence mixed-farmers, to investigate unwelcome boarding conditions. Bowron wrote that she visited many people in the settlement and "During this time I heard a great many tales and could see that the district was badly divided, the teacher coming in for her share of both friends and opponents." Tantalizingly, Bowron stated without elaboration that "Engen has been a difficult school district for sometime and much could be said in regard to some of the

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<sup>78</sup>Interview, Mrs. Steele, November 1987.

<sup>79</sup>Mould, Stumpfarms, p. 117.

unpleasant things that have occurred there recently but I am hopeful that most of the teacher's problems have been removed."<sup>80</sup> In tiny teacher-transient Lily Lake, twelve miles south of Fort Fraser, Bowron reported in March 1929 that the teacher, Miss Mary Burton

had written to me in January saying she would like to see me and discuss matters. Evidently she had been going through a very trying time indeed. She said it had affected the efficiency of her work and on that account seemed greatly worried....The criticism of the Board, which she felt was against her, and the fact that the community had two factions made life very difficult for her.

Lily Lake was a good example of a community of subsistence farmers and roving trappers which by its isolation and poverty intensified the loneliness and frustration of the teacher in the face of hostile local politics.

Although not often detailed in the source material, the reasons for a community's dissatisfaction with the teacher appeared to be genuinely personal. Rare examples give notice of this: In the 1928 Bureau Records Miss Verna Marett described Evelyn, ten miles from Smithers, as "nice" with good living conditions but the following year Bowron noted "some tribulations in this neighbourhood" where a parent caused waves "which chiefly seemed to arise over the treatment of a twin who is rather backward. I suggested the two women get together and talk the matter over quietly." No further explication of the grievance in the Bowron Reports exists.<sup>81</sup> Image and reputation was an important possession in intimate communities. McQuillan who started smoking cigarettes shortly after her arrival in Orange Valley took extensive measures to hide the habit from the local residents.<sup>82</sup> In Alexander Manson School in the remote Ootsa Lake settlement, a

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<sup>80</sup>Bowron Reports, Engen, February 1930.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., Evelyn, June 1929.

<sup>82</sup>See the McQuillan Diary, 1927.

teacher's dismissal was pending because of the company she kept. Bowron wrote

Miss Beechy is...engaged to a man whom the community does not care about, and this man spends far too much time in Miss Beechy's house, having his meals there, etc., and this, with some school problems has caused the trouble.

I called on...one of the trustees who informed me that the Board was going to dismiss her...and I believe [it is] willing to give her an opportunity to resign.<sup>83</sup>

In Houston, the teacher "has been placed in a very trying position which has caused her a great deal of worry. Fortunately, she has the support of a splendid school board who are ready to *protect* her."<sup>84</sup>

Of course some communities were socially harmonious, they gave the teacher no trouble, and the teacher was well-liked and respected in the school,<sup>85</sup> but not to empathize with McQuillan is difficult when on an evening in December 1927 she was finally ready to leave Orange Valley. She finished dinner with the family with whom she boarded, then "there was an argument as to how and who was taking me to the train; no one at all keen which was so pleasant for me."<sup>86</sup> Substantial evidence exists to suggest that the teacher was not always treated fairly, or in McQuillan's case, with dignity, but no where is the case of disrespect for the teacher more apparent than in her

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<sup>83</sup>Bowron Reports, Alexander Manson, September 1931. Miss Beechy did not return to the school the following year.

<sup>84</sup>My italics. Ibid., Houston, February 1930.

<sup>85</sup>For examples of "pleasant" communities which seemed to be at peace with itself and the teacher, see Cedarvale, a tiny mining, trapping, and lumbering community on the Skeena River which was poor and scattered ("the community likes this mode of living...", Bowron Reports, May 1932), but was clean and healthy with the "best [school] building in any of my...Districts," (Inspectors' Reports, 1927) and the teachers were all well-liked; Woodmere, six miles from Telkwa where living conditions were "Fairly Good but rather rough," (Bureau Records, 1923) but the teacher's needs were well provided for and the school was one of the largest community-funded in the district; and Fort St. James and Kispiox which both had school boards that were extremely efficacious.

<sup>86</sup>McQuillan Diary, 1927. For other examples of communities which were unpleasant for the teacher, see the Bureau Records, Inspectors' Reports, and the Bowron Reports especially for Duthie Mines; Francois Lake; and tiny Marten Lake where according to the 1928 Bureau Records, "people seem to have been at loggerheads with each other," while in March 1929 Bowron believed that the teacher "has been through perhaps more than the usual amount of criticism."

living accommodation. Whether the teacher lived in a log cabin, shack, hotel, restaurant, farmhouse, railway station, store, teacherage, or boarded with a family,<sup>87</sup> with few exceptions throughout the district the accommodation was very poor. At the best of times living conditions reflected local poverty. The teacher was never given special treatment, and as an essential criteria for community acceptance she was expected to adapt readily to unfamiliar conditions. For example, large families took in teachers for rent money, but at times offered the teacher only a bed separated from the rest of the house by a curtain.<sup>88</sup> Other communities outrightly refused to board the teacher which left her to find makeshift quarters elsewhere, sometimes miles from the school.<sup>89</sup> Living accommodation was largely dependent on local interest. In both settler- and teacher-transient Decker Lake, one family, the Piches, who rented rooms to travelling tie-hackers, usually had realm over teacher accommodation. With few beds to spare in the entire community overnight guests shared a bed while the teacher slept with Mrs. Piche. (Mr. Piche slept on the couch).

The teachers had all been female until one year when the School Board sent a replacement without advising Mrs. Piche as to whether the teacher was male or female. After preparing her room as usual, she opened the door to a young gentleman and was so non-plussed that she sent him away.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Out of 56 responses in the Bureau Records that dealt with living accommodation in the district, 26 teachers recorded that they boarded with a private family and the second largest group, 8, "batched" in a small cabin.

<sup>88</sup>See McQuillan Diary, 1927, and the Bureau Records and Bowron Reports for Marten Lake; Southbank; and Tchesinkut Lake, where Miss Ellen Murray had to share a small house with nine children. (Bowron Reports, September 1931).

<sup>89</sup>For communities which left the teacher few choices for living accommodation, see Engen, where the boarding facilities were "very uncertain," (Bureau Records, 1928), and the hotel in which the teacher stayed was "a rather uninhabitable place." (Bowron Reports, February 1930); Endako where in 1928 there were "no house conveniences and a very few people willing to board the teacher," (Bureau Records); Telkwa where few people had extra rooms in their tiny houses; and Woodcock: In the 1923 Bureau Records William George Watson wrote that in regards to boarding facilities there were "None. Temporary boarding with the railway section gang."

<sup>90</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 167.

According to the 1923 Bureau Records, the teacher Mr. George Atkinson finally settled in an undisclosed residence "very far, two miles from school." Often the low priority given the teacher's comfort was demonstrated when the teachers lived in dire conditions in communities which otherwise demonstrated an extreme interest in school affairs.<sup>91</sup>

Bowron frequently commented on the teachers' living conditions, sometimes in relation to community problems--for example in Willowvale five miles from Fort Fraser the teacher batched next door to a Board member's house because "this district seems to be known as a little trying for a teacher"<sup>92</sup> --but she also reported on another related issue: the social life of the community. In several settlements Bowron warned prospective teachers that the area was lonely and isolated with few opportunities for exciting leisure activities.<sup>93</sup> With an acute lack of recreational facilities to pass the time, the teacher was often restricted to the occasional dance sometimes miles away in a larger community or to visiting residents in nearby settlements. Here the teacher had to be at her diplomatic best because such infrequent encounters with a large group of local people or frequent meetings with individual families in the district helped make or break a teacher's chance of acceptance in the community.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>See Endako, which had a large well-funded school but extremely poor teacher accommodation (Inspectors' Reports 1927), Bureau Records, 1928; Palling, which despite the residents' unique method of policy-making (fisticuffs) was "one of the best small schools in this inspectorate" (Inspectors' Reports, 1923), but "no one cares to board the teacher." (Bureau Records, 1928); and Perow, whose school was "a credit to the district" (Inspectors' Reports, 1928), but the teacher lived in a small vacant house "some distance from the school...no one lives very near." (Bowron Reports, February, 1930).

<sup>92</sup>Bowron Reports, April 1931.

<sup>93</sup>See *ibid.*, especially for Tchesinkut Lake, Francois Lake, Uncha Valley, and extremely isolated Nadina River where the loneliness was compounded by unfriendly residents; Lily Lake, impoverished Marten Lake, settler-transient Bulkley South, and Perow; teacher-transient Glentanna which had very little social life and few young people (June 1929); and Woodcock, tiny and struggling Cedarvale, and Copper City which was a lonely place although only three miles from Terrace. (May 1932).

<sup>94</sup>The teacher was scrutinized at the dances by the local people, and visiting, or what McQuillan termed the "merry-go-round," was an important part of adapting to local politics. See the McQuillan Diary for an interesting description of the activity of "visiting."

Functioning socially in a remote community was imperative if the teacher was to survive in a one-room school. Adding a further dimension to the unique local politics which forced the teacher to exercise diplomacy and tact was each community's social composition. The teacher could not remain aloof from other residents, which was especially the case considering the male to female ratio in the district. In 1931, 5,735 males were recorded as opposed to 4,143 females, but for the entire census district 50.2 percent of the men 15 years of age and older were single.<sup>95</sup> The large proportion of bachelors in the population may have been a result of the character of the district. Such a newly-opened, rugged area based on subsistence and transient economic activity was not immediately conducive to the formation of large towns characterized by permanent settler families because remaining in any one place for an extended period of time apart from engaging in farming or ranching, for example, would be economically inexpedient. The young, single schoolteacher became a target of the bachelors where at a dance "the local schoolma'am, often the only unmarried adult female in attendance, was invariably the 'belle of the ball' and from the point of view of the males a Saturday night was a dismal failure if [she] failed to show up."<sup>96</sup> At times the community rivalry was serious. The teacher's basket lunches at auctions fetched relatively astronomical prices when, for example, in 1920 in Francois Lake, the teacher's basket was bought for \$35 (the price of a month's rent) when a group of bachelors got together and tried to outbid the teacher's boyfriend, a police constable in the district.<sup>97</sup> Sadly, Mrs. Mary McIntosh in "unco-operative" poorly attended Tatalrose School was edged out of her job when a pressure group of local tie-hacking bachelors at a public meeting requested that she be

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<sup>95</sup>n=4972. See the 1931 Census II, pp. 249, 270-271, 278-287. Unfortunately, marital figures for our district (Census District 8e, f, and g) are unavailable.

<sup>96</sup>Mould, Stumpfarms, p. 126.

<sup>97</sup>Turkki, Burns Lake, p. 246.

dismissed because "there were many unmarried teachers out of work."<sup>98</sup>

An added dimension to the social composition of the local communities but one that did not seem to be a significant factor in promoting social disharmony and teacher frustration was the variety of ethnic or cultural background of the settlers. The largest ethnic group in the district was British (43 percent of the 9908 residents), followed by sprinklings of French, Dutch, Finnish, German, Polish, Scandinavian, and Orientals. Significantly, 33 percent of all the people in the district were native Indian, but only 31 of the 3,312 Indians were not living on reserves.<sup>99</sup> The communities were ethnically and culturally diverse, and "the failure to sustain the immigrants' cultural variety reflects the fact that culture is a collective inheritance, that individuals isolated from the cultural mass are culturally vulnerable....Households and rural neighbourhoods became crucibles of assimilation in which sparsely represented cultures were rapidly eliminated."<sup>100</sup> For this district no evidence exists to suggest that social strife was caused by differences that were ethnically or racially-based.

What in fact the teacher had was an extremely difficult job. Teacher transiency indicated that teaching in a one-room school was a personal experience as well as demanding employment. A sparse settlement pattern, community transiency and impoverishment as well as local school support and intra-community social disharmony often driven by personal disputes were all ingredients in a recipe that made the Terrace to Vanderhoof district a compilation of separate societies. No feasible normal school

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<sup>98</sup>Bureau Records, 1928, and Bowron Reports, September 1931. See also Shephard, "History of Schools," Provincial Archives, 1971.

<sup>99</sup>See the 1931 Census II, pp. 490-491 for a breakdown of the ethnicity among the population in the district.

<sup>100</sup>Harris, "Reflections on the Surface of the Pond," p. 91. This was not the case elsewhere in the province in ethnically-homogeneous communities such as the Japanese fishing villages on the coast or the Doukhobour settlements in the Kootenays where groups of immigrants were isolated from any deleterious effects of outside interference on cultural practises. For a brief discussion of the problems associated with teaching in communities populated predominantly by groups of immigrants, see Chapter II.

training could have prepared the teacher for the idiosyncracies of remote communities she encountered, nor the degree of neglect from the local people of many of the teacher's rights in the way of general working conditions, living accommodation, and the occasional unjustified personal reprimand. Here teaching in a one-room school put the teacher in the rural public's eye and thus she serves as a portal by which the study into British Columbia's rural history can be conducted, as well as an interesting historical protagonist of one of the most important institutions in society.

The one-room schools between Terrace and Vanderhoof is an excellent subject for a case study of education in rural British Columbia. From the establishment of the first school in 1906 to the proliferation of the one-room schools throughout the district in the 1920s, school conditions were seen to be similar to those found in the province as a whole. For example, many one-room schools in both the district and provincial studies suffered from a proponderance of unsuitable teachers, teacher transiency, and generally poor living and working conditions. As well, a look at a small group of schools in a geographically-constricted area demonstrates that teaching in a one-room school was an arduous task. For that reason alone teacher transiency can be readily understood. Moreover, the case study supported the contention that the education officials' perception of the rural school problem and possible solutions seemed to be fundamentally misguided. As discussed in Part I, the administrators neglected to consider the teacher's characteristics which could make remote school teaching difficult--the typical teacher was young, single, and female. Significantly, as rural school conditions remained much the same throughout the 1920s, the education officials continued to overlook the importance of rural society itself. "Rural-minded" teachers had little efficacy in communities which were impoverished, scattered, and transient, as well as over settlers who were at times obstinate in school affairs. In a study of these issues the historian breaches the gap

between uncovering exclusively educational history and the broader question of rural history in general.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

A study of one-room schools in British Columbia of the 1920s is significant. British Columbia's rural educational history has been largely unexplored. Indeed, only recently has Canadian rural history in general been given much print, a sharp contrast to the quantity of research undertaken about France,<sup>1</sup> England,<sup>2</sup> and Europe as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Only Chad Gaffield's work on Prescott County in Ontario,<sup>4</sup> David Gagan's study of Peel County,<sup>5</sup> and David C. Jones' look at the Prairie Dry Belt<sup>6</sup> stand out as recent examples of in-depth Canadian rural history. In particular, the first two works provide exhaustive quantitative analyses as well as sound use of qualitative sources to explain the behaviour of rural families in the face of changing economic circumstance. Articles in several volumes of Canadian Papers in Rural History which are of general interest to "economic and social historians, folklorists, historical geographers, and historians of technology"

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<sup>1</sup>For example, see Marc Bloch, French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics (California: University of California Press, 1967; originally written in 1931); Ted W. Margaradant's historiographical article, "Tradition and Modernity in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century," Journal of Modern History 56, no. 4 (1984): 667-697; Gordon Wright, Rural Revolution in France: The Peasantry in the Twentieth Century (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); and Louise A. Tilly "Reflections on Modern French Rural History," Peasant Studies 11, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 248-260. Peasant Studies began as a newsletter in 1972 and is now published quarterly as a journal by the University of Utah. It is a reflection of the growing importance attributed to studies of rural areas both in Europe and North America.

<sup>2</sup>For example, see David Levine's review article "The Large and Small Pictures of Nineteenth Century Rural England," Peasant Studies 11, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 269-274; Alan MacFarlane, The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>3</sup>A good comprehensive European rural history is Sheldon J. Watts, A Social History of Western Europe, 1450-1720: Tensions and Solidarities Among Rural People (Hutchinson: Hutchinson University Library, 1986).

<sup>4</sup>Chad Gaffield, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict: The Origins of the French Language Controversy in Ontario (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup>David Gagan, Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

<sup>6</sup>David C. Jones, Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt (Edmonton: Alberta University Press, 1987).

have been recently released.<sup>7</sup> Articles on the Canadian West that deal with broad rural developments can be found in D.C. Jones,<sup>8</sup> and in Jones and MacPherson.<sup>9</sup>

Pertinent studies in Canadian rural educational history are even harder to find. Articles that deal with specific topics in British Columbia were mentioned in the Introduction, in particular works by D.C. Jones, most of which were based on his 1978 doctoral dissertation for the University of British Columbia, "Agriculture, The Land, and Education: British Columbia, 1914-1929." Significantly, studies that discuss pointedly the development of rural schooling elsewhere in Canada support the generalizability of research into British Columbia one-room schools. For example, R.S. Patterson's "Voices From the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers" and David C. Jones' "Schools and Social Disintegration in the Alberta Dry Belt of the Twenties," both in Schools in the West,<sup>10</sup> found that school teacher hardships were legion in the many financially strapped one-room schools on the Prairies during the 1920s and 1930s. The phenomenon of young, unmarried, predominantly female teaching corps challenged by work in remote schools seemed to be common for western Canada. John Abbott argues that to educate the isolated child in northern Ontario between 1900-1930 meant to struggle with uncompromising terrain and climate, impoverished and transient communities, and urban-minded administrators who misunderstood the nature of the obstacles, all of which contributed to poor schooling.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Starting in 1978, Langdale Press in Gananoque, Ontario has published five volumes of Canadian Papers in Rural History. A sixth volume is imminent.

<sup>8</sup>We'll All Be Buried Down Here: The Prairie Dryland Disaster, 1917-1926, ed. D.C. Jones (Calgary: Alberta Records Publications Board, 1986).

<sup>9</sup>Building Beyond the Homestead: Rural History on the Prairies, eds. David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985).

<sup>10</sup>Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History, eds. Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson, and David C. Jones (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1986), pp. 99-111, 265-283.

<sup>11</sup>John Abbott, "Hostile Landscapes and the Spectre of Illiteracy: Devising Retrieval Systems for "Sequestered" Children in Northern Ontario, 1875-1930," Imperfect Past: Education and Society in Canadian History, ed. J. Donald Wilson (Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, University of British Columbia, 1984), pp. 181-194.

Also similar to conditions in 1920s British Columbia, Gaffield found that one-room schools in Prescott County during the 1880s were materially wanting, school attendance fluctuated with the demands of farms and logging camps, teacher transiency was rife, the teacher's status in the community was low, and the teacher was considered by provincial education officials as the main impediment to school efficiency.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as this thesis suggests, one-room schools in British Columbia are exemplary of elsewhere in Canada: oblivious to provincial boundaries, rural school scenarios seem to have been remarkably similar across Canada, although not always at the same time.

Equally significant, study of the province's one-room schools shows the usefulness of a perspective on these small rural institutions that emphasizes intimacy. F. Henry Johnson<sup>13</sup> and Alison Prentice,<sup>14</sup> for example, examine large administrative structures or mechanisms of social control. Both of these studies neglect the fact that history is necessarily concerned as much with individuals as with passive and faceless masses. Parents, pupils, and other community members, as well as teachers, were all individual decision-makers. Chad Gaffield strikes at the heart of the importance of this local perspective for historical writing: "Beyond contemporary perceptions and behind the pronouncements of educational officials lived the boys and girls, men and women whose lives gave meaning to the questions of schooling."<sup>15</sup> This is the perspective I have tried to adopt in this study.

In the milieu of rural British Columbia in the 1920s, the teacher was an active participant. Not just part of a "passive" and "faceless" teaching corps, she was

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<sup>12</sup>Gaffield, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict, pp. 101-130.

<sup>13</sup>F. Henry Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1964).

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

<sup>15</sup>Gaffield, Language, Schooling, and Cultural Conflict, p. 30.

conspicuous as manager of the rural schoolhouse and exercised power over day-to-day pedagogical activity. With little outside help, she was responsible for the standard of education each pupil received despite sometimes considerable hardship. The one-room school was run by her clock: in such an intimate atmosphere, each isolated school became as individual as the teacher. This individuality comes forth particularly in the Bureau Records.

Transiency worried educational officials in the first half of the 1920s. It turns out to have been not a mass movement away from smaller schools as most officials believed. Chapter IV showed instead that teachers left one-room schools for highly personal, often undisclosed reasons. For some teachers, neither money nor career advancement by accepting posts in larger, more well-funded schools seemed to be motives behind moving. Instead, where some teachers did not enjoy their work, they simply packed up and left. Essentially, the teacher was an adventurer, subject to the force of her own preferences.

The teacher is the protagonist in this thesis, and her role in rural schools is impossible to ignore. It gives context to the entire question of school reform in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup> In the intellectual climate of progressivism, perfection of the school system demanded that all schools be as "efficient" as possible. Both the Putman-Weir Report and the Annual Reports paid much attention to the question of how to end pupil retardation where it was most acute, in the rural schools. The propensity of teachers to transfer out of small schools after about one year of service indicated to educational reformers and administrators that the best solution to retardation was to equip teachers with the mental tools necessary for successful rural employment, that is, to make the teachers "rural-minded." However, reform of the teacher was a stillborn idea. The reality of

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<sup>16</sup>See Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Revising the History of Teachers: A Canadian Perspective," Interchange 17, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 135-146 for an insightful overview of important historical questions which may be addressed through the study of teachers.

remote school teaching was too pervasive: young, single, inexperienced women were teaching in isolated pioneer communities. The problems associated with this scenario were beyond rectification by mere improvement of normal school training.

The failure of rural school reform uncovers two broad, important historical issues. First, in British Columbia in the 1920s, a dichotomy existed between rural and urban areas. Proposed reform of the rural schools was misguided because in addition to being distracted by growth in the urban school system, the Department of Education had little feedback as to the true conditions of remote communities. Inspectors were the middlemen through which communication between Victoria and the hinterland was exchanged, but due to poor transportation and communication 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. They did not consider with any seriousness the intricacies of rural living or the characteristics of the teacher which could hamper successful employment in the small school.

By the same token, rural communities, because of their isolation, saw little of the government. This allowed for community members--another group of people "whose lives gave meaning to the question of schooling"--to exercise considerable authority over local schools. Their authority was not always clear, however, as by statute the community had power to establish the school, raise taxes for its maintenance, and hire and fire the teacher, but similarly by law the Department of Education was responsible for the functioning of the entire provincial public school system, and throughout the 1920s it asserted this right whenever possible. Indeed, as the blueprint for reform, the Putman-Weir Report recommended an overall strengthening of the centralization of educational control in the province in order to impose a uniform "efficiency" on all

schools. Thus, late into the decade, in some areas local school boards were being replaced with "official trustees," administrative consolidation was attempted in Vanderhoof, Lottie Bowron was appointed by the government as a "comforter" for one-room school teachers in distress, and a programme for training rural representatives of the Department, "rural-minded" teachers, was proposed.

Tension existed between the local school boards and the central school administration, and neglect or outright resistance to policies imposed from above was common. For example, the diverse conditions of the one-room schools made the 1911 Public Works designs for uniformity in the construction of provincial one-room schools worthless.<sup>17</sup> School consolidation was extremely slow due to local misgivings about accompanying tax increases.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 1920s Inspectors' Reports submitted to local school boards recorded numerous incidents of recommendations for school improvements which went unheeded. And in some communities, animosity was directed towards the teacher, whose stigma as an "outsider" led to considerable local ostracism.

A discussion of the two separate entities of community and central control of rural schools introduces the second and related issue of historical import, the rural communities themselves. Using the teacher as an historical focus, this thesis considered rural living in the 1920s to be characterized by hardship, isolation, loneliness, and occasionally danger. Specifically, one aspect of rural communities discussed in Chapter IV was community politics. In many impoverished and scattered communities, economic egalitarianism made one voice in school affairs equal to the next; thus, local politics was often dominated by inter-personal conflict, so unique to each community that school

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<sup>17</sup>For a discussion of the proposal for similarity among one-room school construction throughout the province, see Ivan J. Saunders, "A Survey of British Columbia School Architecture to 1930," Parks Canada Research Bulletin no. 225 (November 1984).

<sup>18</sup>See Alan H. Child, "A Little Tempest: Public Reaction to the Formation of a Large Educational Unit in Peace River District of British Columbia," B.C. Studies no. 16 (Winter 1972-1973): 57-70.

conditions and teacher comfort varied from one region to another.

As well, the community's economic activity, in particular the priority of family solvency, was an important factor in local schooling. For example, local school attendance fluctuated wildly as seasonal tie-hacking drove families back and forth between Decker Lake and Palling in search of work. When lumber or tie industries faltered in Usk and Fort Fraser, families emigrated *en masse* from the communities, and as a result school attendance decreased dramatically, sometimes forcing the school to close altogether.<sup>19</sup> In addition, school attendance fell victim to the child's value as an extra (or only) source of family income. At times, parents in agricultural communities kept their children on the farm to do chores, and in tie-hacking areas male children missed school as they were needed to help cut and haul logs. Again, school attendance suffered while some schools closed. These individual decisions within the family--where to settle to maximize immediate financial benefits, and allotting the children's time between work and school--made the one-room school's survival in many communities unpredictable.

Starting from a study of rural schools in British Columbia in the 1920s, future research could follow a number of directions. This thesis dealt with the central education officials' myopic perception of rural school problem. Little is known about the Department's structure and function in the past, however; What were its hierarchical lines of command and the actual mechanics of policy-making? What exactly went on behind closed doors? Who set policy? Unfortunately, sources needed to unravel these questions would be hard to obtain--many Department documents have not survived from these years--but research may be pursued from another angle. More direct study is

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<sup>19</sup>See Chapters III and IV.

needed of supervision in the province's rural schools, in particular the character and career ambitions of the inspectors, some of whom travelled thousands of miles every year.<sup>20</sup> A clearer awareness might well be provided of employment opportunities and possibilities for career advancement in the Department of Education available to men and women in the 1920s. As well, research could give attention to the sexual division of labour characteristic of the Department and government as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Such information could uncover some aspects of the Department's "pecking order" while promoting an even better understanding of the rural school problem as perceived by a bureaucrat in Victoria "looking out" onto the province's hinterland.

The one-room schools themselves offer plenty to consider. In the future, research into pedagogical "efficiency" could include a study of the dynamics of the 1920s rural classroom, in particular teacher-pupil relations, and how it differed from multi-room rural and urban schools which both recorded lower retardation rates. As well, clues to further research is contained in "Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s," where J.D. Wilson remarks on superior school conditions in some company towns. In communities such as Premier Mines near the Portland Canal in northern British Columbia, and Corbin in the Crowsnest Pass, schools were "first-rate" due to the support of local companies which

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<sup>20</sup>For one of the few studies into the structure of the school supervisory system, see Thomas Fleming's article, "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," Schools in the West, pp. 285-303.

<sup>21</sup>Alison Prentice at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education is active in the historical study of women teachers and their role in the bureaucratization of the school and state systems. See especially articles co-authored with Marta Danylewycz: "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto," History of Education Quarterly XX, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 75-100; "Teacher's Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Central Canada," Labour/Le Travail 17 (Spring 1986): 59-80; and with Beth Light, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study," Histoire Sociale/Social History 16, no. 31 (1983): 81-109.

had sound reputations for service to schooling and community.<sup>22</sup> Local employers' influence over school conditions hints at the potential for comparing local conditions as well as other aspects of rural schools such as enrolment, attendance, teacher accommodation and transiency with other case studies. This might uncover how schools differed between company towns and subsistence farming communities; fishing or railway communities as opposed to schools in areas of diversified economies such those as between Terrace and Vanderhoof; coastal versus inland settlements; and frontier in contrast to more accessible regions. To suggest an even more ambitious study: how did these aspects of rural schooling change over time, for example into the Depression of the 1930s?

As the focus shifts to the isolated community, research could be conducted into the rural perception of the role of education in society. As discussed in Part II, the priority given to schooling among families was high, probably second only to making a living. The appearance of a school in the early years of each settlement and the increased number of petitions for superior and high schools throughout the 1920s demonstrate the importance local people placed on education. In this context, what end did education serve as perceived by the community? Did interest in the local school indicate a belief in the use of education in pupil social mobility?

Finally, a study of rural teachers and schools invites research into non-educational questions. Community conditions as well as the economic and idiosyncratic behaviour of community members are important considerations in any serious work into a previously ignored facet of British Columbia's past. Here, the educational historian is in fact

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<sup>22</sup>J.D. Wilson, "The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s," A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings (Toronto: Clark Pitman, forthcoming).

exploring rural life itself. A study of one-room schools in British Columbia in the 1920s is only a beginning. It is a means by which research can be conducted not only into educational history but rural history as a whole.

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