

# **HISTORY OF THE NINETTE SCHOOL**

Keith Worden  
1956  
Registry/general/reports/Ninette School

The first school in the present town of Ninette was opened in 1900, on the first day of September. It was situated at the present intersection of Riverside Street and Grove Avenue. Approximately twenty-four feet wide by thirty feet long, it faced east. The building was flat roofed and there was a belfry on the top front. The large bell which occupied this belfry was rung fifteen minutes before classes opened and fifteen minutes before classes were closed for the day.<sup>1</sup> The lumber for the building of the school was hauled from Brandon, fifty miles distant, since there was no railroad nearer at the time.<sup>2</sup>

The school grounds were then only about one-quarter the present size of one hundred by fifty yards. The grounds, except for a miniature baseball field, were for the most part covered by bush and scrub.<sup>3</sup> The bush probably was at times very tempting to "hookey" players and would also offer very good concealment for such "student affairs".

There was a house for the school caretaker, adjoining the school lot, which Mr. Wesley Hamilton occupied for years.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Hamilton was the first sexton<sup>5</sup> of the school and was still sexton when I started school in 1942 – a long record! The school was heated with one of these tall, "coke-bottle-shaped" stoves<sup>6</sup> such as is presently employed in the C.N.R. station at Ninette, and which are probably seen in many railway stations yet.

The oldest register, still preserved, and which covers the years 1900 to 1906 states: the teacher in 1900 was Mr. Theodora A. Girling, a third-class teacher with professional diploma who had two and one-half months normal training, who received four hundred and twenty dollars per annum (Teachers of today take heed!); that there were thirty seven pupils being taught; and that the trustees were Mr. Thomas Folliott, Mr. John Yellowlees, founder of Yellowlees store, Mr. John Putnam, and Mr. Raymond R. Houghton, secretary treasurer. The secretary treasurer's salary was twenty dollars per annum.

Names that appear on this old register are: (an asterisk [\*] indicates that the family or their descendants still reside in Ninette and district) Putnam; Hunter \*; Campbell; Wilkie \*; Ross; Graham \*; Dangerfield; Davis; Stark; Overend; Morrison \*; Mackie \*; Monk \*; Lang; and Folliott.

This is the only list of names that will be found in this work. Listing the various names of people who have attended the school is tiresome both to me and the reader.

Mr. Girling taught in Ninette until the thirtieth day of September 1903. During the 1902-1903 term Mr. Girling taught thirty-nine pupils. Mr. E. Benson Steele took over from Mr. Girling in the fall of 1903 and taught forty-seven pupils – the population was growing rapidly! Mr. Steele was a professional, second class teacher with six and one-half months normal training. Mr. Steele did not stay long, however, for on May seventh 1904, Mr. Arthur Leighton took his place. Mr. Leighton was a permit teacher. In 1902 the teacher's salary was raised sixty dollars a year from \$420 to \$480.

In 1904 Mr. Leighton was again the teacher of forty-four pupils. A Mr. Leslie B. Grace taught for a short time during the first part of the 1905 term, and was replaced by Miss Edith Johnston, who taught forty-six pupils.

The dates on the registers now jump from 1906 up to 1923, therefore I can enumerate little on those years. I will take the opportunity, however, and give information I received from people who attended the school. About the year 1911 or 1912 the one-room school was changed over to a two-room school.<sup>7</sup> The additional room was put on the top of the other, making a two-storey building of the school. One went to the upper room by way of an outside staircase, which also served as a fire escape. The usual windows supplied the lighting, and were strung out on the south side of the building on both floors. A large crescent was placed over the door which read; Ninette School District No. 1028. The heating system remained unchanged! There were 181 square feet of black-board.

Miss Dodge, of undetermined origin, was the teacher in this school in 1912-13 and 1913-1914. Miss Dodge acted as principal, while Miss Bartwell, of Killarney taught the primary room during the same period.<sup>8</sup>

Some time during these years the school grounds were enlarged to approximately one-half the present size. The grounds remained unchanged, however, as far as bush and scrub were concerned.<sup>9</sup>

Miss Pearl Phillips keeps a very interesting group of old pictures which I was fortunate enough to see and which, of course give an excellent insight into the mode of dress at the time. The girls wore long dresses and sweaters over them. The dresses I would not term the flowing type but rather those shapeless things that hung straight down with practically no effort whoever to distinguish the waist line. They parted their hair in the middle, had few curls in evidence and braids were not uncommon.

The boys wore what looks like denim overalls and a suit jacket over them. The jacket is of the old single-breasted, narrow lapel type. They wore either woolen, peaked caps or the old peaked cloth cap, termed "aviation caps", but they were in circulation long before aviation. It seems as though the boys than were as adverse to combing their hair as the boys of the present era are.

Now we may take a look at the 1923-1924 register. The teacher of the school then was Miss Elsie I. Kerr, who is the present widow of Mr. Finlay Yellowlees. The teacher of the primary grades was Miss Mary Macmillan. Miss Kerr taught twenty-one pupils while Miss Macmillan taught fifty-seven. One entry in Miss Kerr's register tells us that one Louis Oly died at the age of eleven years. This was the end of the first week of November. The school, the register tells us, was closed by the public health officer from November seventh to the twenty-seventh. A similar entry in Miss Macmillan's register tells that master Derrick Moule passed away at the age of eleven years, on the same day as master Oly. These entries offered me some difficulty in regard to the cause of death. Due to the concurrence of the event of their death and the closing of the school I attributed death to some epidemic. My father Mr. Milton Worden, recalls that masters Moule and Oly were drowned in Pelican Lake, while playing on

thin ice. He says that the 'Oly' must be an abbreviation for 'Olychuck', since that was the boy's name. This incident is developed further in section two.

Miss Macmillan taught for the first half term only, when Miss C.M. Mott took over. The register relates that the school was visited by Inspector Parr on Thursday, October 25, 1923. We see that the teacher's salary, now, is up to eight hundred dollars a year!

Thanks for the use of the old registers goes to Mr. Joe Scott, present secretary treasurer for the school district.

We now come to overlapping events in the history of the Ninette school. They are the erection of a new school at the same time as the old school was in operation. Since the time element in the latter case is so much shorter than in the former, let us first deal with the last year of operation of the old school, opened in 1911, closed and torn down in 1926.

The teacher of the primary grades for the last year of operation was Miss Jean C. Bell, who taught thirty-one pupils. Unfortunately there is no record whatever for the second school room for this year. The board of trustees for the school in its last year of operation was made up of the following: Mr. Sam Clark; Mr. W.H. 'Bert' Thomson; Mr. John Crawford; and Mr. Archie Bell as secretary treasurer.<sup>10</sup>

In finishing, I may fill in with facts such as the following which could not be easily inserted elsewhere. Mr. Parr is said to have been the first school inspector of the district. If this is true, Mr. Parr had a tremendously long record of service! One time teachers in the old school were: Mr. Ralph Clench; Miss Eva Calverly; and Miss Mary Graham. These persons' parents were all pioneers in the district and their relatives are still residing in the Ninette district. Mr. Clench was killed in the first World War.

Here begins the present phase of the history of the Ninette School district. The old school was crowded with its average of sixty some pupils a year. A new school was wanted...A then modern school was proposed by one Mr. Partford (Parfitt), architect from the Department of Education, who had designed a new school at Brookdale, Manitoba. A committee of two, Mr.

Joseph A. Davreaux, member of the present board of trustees and acting mechanic of Ninette, and Mr. Donald Macdonald, then secretary treasurer of the school board and present postmaster in Ninette, were delegated to Brookdale to survey the new school there.<sup>11</sup>

Now, although a new school was desired by all, there was some controversy over the building of such a large school in such a comparatively small district. The school proposed by Mr. Parkford truly was then considered a large school. The committee returned with a favourable report, opposition was defeated and plans went ahead, through the main promotion, I take it, of Mr. John Crawford.<sup>12</sup>

The school, a duplicate of the school at Brookdale, began to take form in 1925 and was completed in 1926. It was erected by the G.W. Epton contracting company, Brandon,<sup>13</sup> at an estimated net cost of from 15,000 to 20,000 dollars. Debentures were taken up by Mr. Harry Overend, still resident of Ninette.<sup>14</sup>

The school is a two-storey brick building with the first floor as a basement which rises about eight feet off ground level. In order to get an idea of the construction, come on a tour around the building with me. We find the front door at the south end of the building (we could enter from the back but may encounter a little difficulty in gaining entrance as this is generally used as a fire escape), we enter and find ourselves in a small porch with another double door facing us. On opening these doors we are confronted by two staircases, one leading up, the other leading down. We will start at the bottom and work up, so let's go downstairs and see what is there. We descend fifteen steps and find ourselves in a long narrow hall. We turn to our left and see two doors, one to our right and one straight ahead of us. The one to our right leads to the girls' toilets and the one ahead of us opens to the janitor's workshop. We turn and find a door to our right again. On opening this door and entering, we find ourselves in an auditorium, running the full length of the school, and with a stage at the front end of it. This is where the annual school concerts are staged. We leave the auditorium and walk slightly to our right to about the centre of the hall. Another door, locked this time, is before us. This is the boiler

room, the heart of the school's heating system. There is an adjoining coal bin inside. At the end of the hall is a dressing room, used in conjunction with the amusement hall. When facing the end of the hall the door to the boys' toilets is to our left. We have seen the basement, so we climb the fifteen steps back to the landing from where we started.

We now climb the stairs leading up, only thirteen steps this time (to the gallows??!!) We find ourselves in a twelve by thirty-six hall, identical to the one in the basement. To our right is a door with glass in the upper half. If we were to open this door, and if it were not a weekend we should find Miss Lawson teaching grades one to four. Back in the hallway there is another door directly opposite the first. This opens into an unused room called the spare room. Up the hall about ten feet we see another set of doors, one on each side of the hall. The one to our left, if we face north, is the door to the classroom where Mr. Chalmers presently teaches grades nine to eleven. The other is the door to the classroom where Mrs. Chalmers teaches grades five to eight. At the end of the hall we find a laboratory, through which one must go to get to the fire escape. There is a drinking fountain in the corner, so "let's take a drink of the magic potion that will take us back thirty years to the fall of 1926... Music, Sam..."

The day is September nineteenth 1926. We attend the official opening of the school. Dr. D.A. Stewart<sup>15</sup> occupies the chair and he "opens the meeting with fitting remarks." The Right Honourable Clark Cannon, Minister of Education, and member of the Legislative Assembly for this, the Mountain constituency, is present and he addresses the meeting. Dr. R.F. Fletcher, Deputy Minister of Education is also present.<sup>16</sup>

Classes were begun on September twentieth 1926, at nine a.m., and were conducted by: Miss Janet L. More, from Dand, Manitoba, grades nine to eleven; Miss Carson, from Killarney, grades five to eight; and Miss Katrine Clench, Ninette, grades one to four. Miss Clench was substituting for the regular teacher, Miss Jean C. Bell, from Killarney.<sup>17</sup>

Since the school was opened in 1926 there have been a total of forty-five teachers hired by the school board. This compares with a possible ninety teachers over the thirty year period

to 1956. The longest period of time for any one teacher to remain at Ninette is seven years; this record belongs to Mr. J.W.L. Graham. Mr. Lightly and Mr. A.L. Herron are former Ninette teachers who are presently instructing in Normal School.<sup>18</sup>

The number of students attending the school per year now averages about eighty. At present there are eighty-three students in the school. There has been a goodly number of transient students pass through the Ninette School over the period of years it has been in operation.

## PART II

### My Search for “Info”

On the evening of January the fourth 1956, I called at the home of Mr. Donald Macdonald, postmaster in Ninette and inquired whether or not he could give me any information regarding the history of the Ninette School. The suggestion to see him came from Mr. R.L. Chalmers, Ninette School principal, whom I had asked if he had access to any information along that line. Mr. Macdonald was secretary treasurer of the board of trustees for some time after the ‘new’ school was built. Mr. Macdonald was very cooperative and gave me all the information he could, for which I am very thankful. Such information includes the controversial viewpoints in regard to the building of a new school, the first board of trustees after the building of the new school, the location of the first school, and the names of persons who might know more than he. My host talked while I hastily scribbled notes on the substance of his discourse.

On the same evening I called at the home of Mr. Samuel Clark, a long-time resident of the Ninette district and former member of the school board. Mr. Clark, unfortunately, could recall little due to a memory clouded with old age. His stepdaughter, however, who went to school in the old school, recalled various bits of information which I was quite happy to receive. Here is one recurring incident which Miss Phillips related:

“In the mornings, in the winter, before school started, and before the teacher arrived, the boys would be fooling around and the pipes from the old heater would fall down. By the time the teacher arrived the day would be declared a holiday and every one would go home.” No doubt everyone would be happy about this and take their holiday gladly.

Miss Phillips also recalls that, since only grades one to eight were taught in Ninette at Christmas, there would be twelve of fifteen boys and girls home on the train from Belmont, where they boarded and took grades nine to eleven. This would be an event to look forward to with pleasure as the train carrying “the wanderers” was always met by the other students.

Other details recalled by Miss Phillips are; Sunday School (non-sectarian) was taught in the upstairs of the school; a Christmas concert was put on jointly by the school and the church; and the names of various teachers, including Norman Monk, Miss Goodsky, Miss Moore, Ralph Clench, Eva Calverly, and Mary Graham.

Before my visit ran its course, Miss Phillips showed me some very interesting old pictures. There were pictures of the students who went to school in Ninette in the earlier days, the beginning of the Ninette Sanatorium, Mrs. Dodge, and the mode of travel used by the Spackmans in travelling to and from school. The last I must describe.

This "vehicle" looked like an Indian travois set up on the axle between two buggy wheels. It ('it', refers to the shafts by which the 'cart' was drawn, and small platform which was built on the shafts and which extended a foot or so to the rear), was made of poles, tied in place with leather (?) thongs. The apparatus was drawn by a Shetland pony which, apparently, was led, not driven! The people in the picture were a boy and a girl; the girl was seated, while the boy led the pony.

The evening terminated thus and I went home to bed.

The following evening I called at the home of Mr. Joseph Scott, acting secretary treasurer of the school board. Mr. Scott took the first minute book from a cupboard. In it was written an account of the official opening of the school in 1926 and also such information as the name of the company that built the school, the acting trustees and the first staff of the school, the acting trustees and the first staff of the school. Mr. Scott also provided access to the old registers, which were both informative and interesting, not only to me but also to Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers.

Various entries in the registers treat the same subject. Some of these are: "severe blizzard, no attendance;" "cold epidemic – school closed by Public Health Officer;" and merely "school closed by Public Health Officer." The 'severe blizzard' business is understandable, since the entries usually are put in the middle of winter; but when you see one that reads: "Too

cold to teach, room too cold" on September twenty-fourth, you begin to wonder just what kind of weather they had to put up with in those days!

Here I suppose I must keep my promise and develop the incident in regard to the drowning of masters Louis Oly(chuck) and Derrick Moule (pronounced: Mole).

The latter part of October and the first few days of November in the year 1923 had been cold enough to freeze the lake over. The next few days of November brought a change, however, and the ice on the lake thinned out. Masters Oly and Moule happened to be playing on a specially thin bit of ice and fell into the freezing water of the lake, where they drowned. Louis had only one hand. The other had been blown off while he was playing with dynamite, which exploded. Over the stub he wore a leather mitt affair. This mitt was found in the hand of his friend when the bodies were found. What does this signify? who knows? Perhaps the boys were holding hands when suddenly Derrick fell through the ice, and as he slid into the watery depths took Louis' mitt with him, only to be followed by his friend. Perhaps Derrick was by himself when he fell and as his friend tried to save him, Louis' mitt was pulled off and he too was drawn into the water. Perhaps, ...? we will never know the truth. Or shall we?

The bodies were not found until four days later. A hole was seen just out from Manhattan Beach (which was the hole the boys had fallen through) which is about four miles from the town, travelling across the lake, and is on the east shore line. No one was able to get to the spot, since the ice was not hard enough to walk on, and no other means could be devised to traverse the distance between there and the shore. The hole was marked somehow, however, and the people sat back to wait for the refreezing of the ice. Instead of refreezing the ice broke-up! Men went out in boats and at last found the bodies. The boys were buried in the Ninette cemetery. Louis Olychuck's father was the town's shoemaker and Derrick Moule's father was the baker.

The 1925-1926 register tells that "an Empire Celebration was held on June third, 1926. A patriotic programme was held in the auditorium (of the new, uncompleted school) and there

were sports for the children on the athletic grounds. The parents visited the school at ten-thirty and the teachers attended a programme at the Sanatorium at three-thirty.

That about covers the part that the registers played in my search except for giving the names of trustees and teachers down through the years. These, to list them, would be far too cumbersome.

The day following my visit at the home of Mr. Scott, I sent a letter to Mr. Harry Lowe, who is an old timer in the district and asked him various questions that I thought he might be able to answer. Mr. Lowe cleared up one detail that had been controversial. It was rumoured that the first school in Ninette had burned down. This is incorrect. There was a school in the district burned but it was the school of Pelican Lake. This was actually the first school in the district, but at the time it burned, another school had been built in the present town of Ninette.

That evening I spoke to Mr. Robert McElroy and his brother Melville, who both went to the old Ninette school. Bob recalls the following incident:

"One day Finn Yellowlees wouldn't take off his rubbers, at the teacher's command. Two of the other boys, and myself, cut switches from the school ground supply for brush and Finn was switched from the end of the last recess til four o'clock, but he wouldn't give in."!!!

Mr. Melville McElroy told me that the games most played were baseball and football, and that the teachers generally had quite a hard time to handle their pupils.

That concluded "my search for info." The duration of the search was two weeks and the compiling took another two, although of course it was not continuous work. I will close now, my friends, for "I have written far into the night," and "fain wauld lie doon."

Keith Worden  
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Melville McElroy, and also Miss Pearl Phillips.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Basil Sykes.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. M. McElroy, his brother Robert, and Miss P. Phillips. The bit on the hookey players is my own supposition.

<sup>4</sup> Those named in 3.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Harvey Lowe.

<sup>6</sup> Mr. R. McElroy

<sup>7</sup> Miss Phillips for the change, Mr. McElroy for the new school's construction.

<sup>8</sup> Miss Phillips.

<sup>9</sup> Mr. M. McElroy and Mr. H. Lowe.

<sup>10</sup> This information has handed down to me by Mr. Sam Clark himself. Mr. Clark came to the district in 1909.

<sup>11</sup> This information was handed down to me by Mr. Sam Clark himself. Mr. Clark came to the district in 1909.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Donald Macdonald.

<sup>13</sup> The minute book – thus, thanks to Mr. J.M. Scott

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Harry Lowe.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Stewart was the founder of the Ninette sanatorium.

<sup>16</sup> The minute book, these minutes were written by Mr. D. Macdonald.

<sup>17</sup> The minute book, these minutes were written by Mr. D. Macdonald.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. R.L. Chalmers, present Ninette principal, who looked over the old registers with me, revealed that these two men are teachers in Normal School.