

# Schooling in British Columbia: Pre-Confederation

## BCSSA Historical Timeline



B.C.'s First Nations practice informal learning by doing for millennia prior to contact with Europeans.

**Pre-colonization**

Captain Cook sails into B.C.'s waters and claims the land for Great Britain.

**1778**

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) builds a fort at the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

**1842**

Vancouver Island becomes a British colony and its first school opens in Fort Victoria.

**1849**

Reverend Edward Cridge is recruited to replace Reverend Staines.

**1854**

Craigflower School is built near the Gorge waterway outside Fort Victoria for the children of farm employees.

**1854-55**

HBC employs a second schoolmaster for the children of employees in Nanaimo.

**1853**

The colony's first governor, James Douglas, makes 14 land purchases from the island's Indigenous people.

**1850**

The Fraser River gold rush attracts 30,000+ people to the newly founded colony of British Columbia.

**1858**

Victoria's colonial government assumes responsibility for schooling on Vancouver Island.

**1859**

The mainland colony at New Westminster opens its first school.

**1862**

The Colonial Legislature passes the first Free School Act.

**1865**

Canada becomes a nation.

**1867**

The colony of Vancouver Island merges with the mainland colony of British Columbia.

**1866**

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## Schooling in British Columbia: Pre-Confederation

# Our first schoolmaster and schoolmistress

As the Hudson Bay Company's operations in Fort Victoria flourished, the need for a teacher for the children of the officials grew. In early 1848, the company received a recommendation initially for a position in Fort Vancouver. HBC immediately wrote to the Reverend Robert John Staines, who was at the time teaching in France. Staines replied in March, setting out his and his wife's qualifications for the appointment:

"I could take the Classics, Mathematics, and every branch of the usual routine of an English education, including drawing if required.... Mrs. Staines is perfectly qualified to take every department in the usual course of a gentleman's education, including music and French...."

Both he and his wife considered "religious instruction in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England as an indispensable part of a sound education."

The Staines arrived in Fort Victoria on March 17, 1849. He received

a salary of £100 a year for his services as a chaplain; supporters of the school paid him an additional £340 a year.

The school—and the Staines' residence—was located within the fort and above a building known as Bachelors Hall. The hall was the site of most of the fort's revelries and the centre of much of Victoria's early social life. The school's 17 children were known to pour water through cracks and holes in the floor that fell onto the men below, perhaps to quiet them during rowdy get-togethers.

While Reverend Staines received mixed reviews from his employers and pupils; Mrs. Staines was thought of as invaluable. Differences of opinion arose between the reverend and his employer; his services were dispensed with in 1854. Staines made to return to England, but his ship foundered at sea and he died. Mrs. Staines did return to England at a later date.

"Mrs. Staines  
was thought of  
as invaluable."

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## Schooling in British Columbia: Pre-Confederation

# The oral tradition of learning

B.C.'s Indigenous people have used the oral tradition to pass down stories, histories, lessons, and other knowledge for millennia. These teachings allowed First Nations to know their history and to keep their cultures and identities alive. The oral tradition is a vital part of Indigenous societies and connects generations in a shared understanding.

The oral tradition goes beyond storytelling and incorporates other elements such as singing, dancing and drumming. Most stories are told as practical lessons and knowledge passed down from Elders also transmits guidance regarding a group's social, moral, and ethical expectations. Plots often reflect real occurrences and merge supernatural characters and circumstances. Similarities between stories handed down by different First Nations indicate that the oral tradition was used to mark significant environmental events like earthquakes and floods.

The oral tradition is a highly developed teaching tool. People often learn best and remember well information that is conveyed orally rather than through writing. Having someone demonstrate a process and explain it can be a more effective way to learn.

Passing on information orally remains a significant part of Indigenous people's traditional values and beliefs and oral history

has been used as legal evidence in court cases concerning title to land rights. Regarding Aboriginal title in northwestern B.C., one Elder famously asked government officials, "If this is your land, where are your stories?"



"The oral tradition goes beyond storytelling and incorporates other elements such as singing, dancing and drumming."

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## Schooling in British Columbia: Pre-Confederation

# Our first superintendent of schools

**M**ount Waddington—it's the highest mountain in B.C. and was named for Alfred Waddington, the first colonial superintendent of schools for the colony of Vancouver Island.

Waddington was born in London in 1801 and joined the thousands of others who journeyed to Victoria in 1858 during the Fraser River gold rush. It wasn't gold that lured Waddington so much as encouraging settlement in the colony. He has the distinction of writing the first non-government book that was ever published there: *Fraser Mines Vindicated*. He was elected to the House of Assembly in 1860, campaigning on a platform of religious equality, women's rights, and small government. He only lasted a year in the House but remained active in politics. Waddington helped draft the charter for the City of Victoria in 1862 but declined to be nominated as its first mayor. He tried unsuccessfully to build a wagon road to the Cariboo gold fields

between 1862-64, a venture that left him close to bankrupt.

Waddington was the successful applicant for the post of superintendent of education for the colony in 1865. His responsibilities included hiring teachers for the Central School, maintaining that building, and establishing a school in Nanaimo for the children of miners. When Vancouver Island was annexed into the colony of British Columbia in 1866, the Board of Education on which

Waddington served no longer had any authority. He resigned in 1867.

Waddington turned his attention to campaigning for a transcontinental railway to be built along the same route as his earlier Bute Inlet gold rush route. He was in Ottawa lobbying for this when he died of smallpox in 1872.



*"Waddington was the successful candidate for the post of superintendent of education for the colony in 1865."*

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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

# John Jessop: The first provincial superintendent of education

B.C.'s 1872 School Act assumed that only a strong central authority could provide the vision and control necessary for a provincial school system in such a vast province. John Jessop, whose aspirations to become an educational leader stretched back many years before he was appointed as our first provincial superintendent in 1872, served as that authority. The position earned him an annual salary of \$2,000, which was one of the best paid roles in the provincial civil service.

For most of his six years as superintendent, Jessop was the entire Education Office. The budget in 1872 was \$23,435—six per cent of the provincial government's expenditures. Jessop's greatest challenge was managing the system of schools spread across our province and he travelled by foot, horseback, buggy, stagecoach, steamer, and canoe to inspect every school. In his first tour in 1873, he travelled 2,400 kilometres. Jessop also responded personally to a huge volume of correspondence, as he also took care of all administrative matters.

He embraced the position's challenges and during his tenure the public school system expanded and improved. Common schools increased from 14 to 45; the number of teachers tripled. He standardized teaching so that each school followed the same curriculum and established a textbook depository; professional development was encouraged and, in 1876, B.C.'s first high school opened.

Jessop advocated for provincial boarding schools in sparsely populated areas. The only one to ever

open, Central Boarding School in Cache Creek, was mired in scandal and the ensuing controversy led to Jessop's downfall. His influence declined significantly and he resigned in 1878. Jessop's request for a pension for his many years of service was under consideration when he collapsed from a heart attack and died in 1901.

*"Jessop's greatest challenge was managing the system of schools spread across our province..."*

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# Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

## BCSSA Historical Timeline



Canada becomes a nation.  
**1867**

British Columbia joins Confederation.  
**1871**

The provincial government assumes responsibility for supporting public schooling.  
**1872**

Superintendent Jessop departs on his first school inspection tour.  
**1873**

Indigenous children are removed from their homes and families and sent to residential schools.  
**1880**

Victoria High School is the first high school in the West.  
**1876**

The first brick school in the province—Victoria Central—is built, replacing an earlier log structure.  
**1875**

Colin Campbell McKenzie becomes our second superintendent of education.  
**1883**

David Wilson is appointed as the first inspector of schools.  
**1887**

Agnes Deans Cameron becomes the first female high school teacher in B.C.  
**1890**

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Alexander Robinson becomes provincial superintendent of schools.  
**1899**

James Baker is our province's first minister of education.  
**1892**



## Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

# Residential schools in B.C.

The residential school system was created by the federal government in the 1880s to indoctrinate and assimilate Indigenous children; it was a form of cultural genocide. There were at least 22 such schools in B.C. that were managed by church groups. Attendance was mandatory: children were taken forcibly from their homes and their families. The consequences were enormous, severely damaging, and long-lasting.

Children in residential schools were not allowed to speak their own languages, were taught that their cultures were inferior, and that they were worthless. The students were often abused physically, emotionally, sexually, psychologically, and spiritually. The schools provided an inferior education with a focus on training pupils for manual labour.

One of the last residential schools to operate in B.C. was on Meares Island near Tofino. The Christie (Kakawis) school opened in 1900 and did not close until 1983. An average of 44 students attended each year. In Williams Lake, St.

Joseph's Mission ran from 1890 to 1981. In the 1950s, it housed approximately 300 children from the Shuswap area. Parents were not allowed to visit and students could return home for only one month of the year.

By the 1980s, Canadian churches began issuing apologies for participating in the system, but it was not until 1996 that the last residential school in our country closed. In 1998 the federal government issued a statement of reconciliation. Many former students participated in a class action suit and demanded

compensation. A settlement was reached in 2005 that led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Government of Canada released an official apology for the residential school system in 2005.

Intergenerational healing has begun but the effects of the residential school system will continue to be felt for many years to come.

*"The consequences were enormous, severely damaging, and long-lasting."*

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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

# Amor de Cosmos: A strong advocate for public education

He has been called British Columbia's Father of Confederation. Amor de Cosmos is also remembered as our province's second premier as well as the founder of The Daily British Colonist (the forerunner of the Victoria Times-Colonist). Throughout his life, de Cosmos used his political and journalist voice to advocate for many causes, one of which was free public education.

Born William Alexander Smith in 1825, he changed his name in 1854 "to what I love most...Love of order, beauty, the world, the universe." De Cosmos took on the province's top leadership spot in 1872 when then Premier John Foster McCreight resigned on a motion of non-confidence. De Cosmos's government continued the policy begun by McCreight of implementing a system of free, non-sectarian public schooling—something that de Cosmos had been calling for long before B.C. joined Confederation. He was

resolute in his opposition to any kind of religious teaching within a publicly supported education system.

A true eccentric with a flamboyant personality and strong opinions, de Cosmos was also known to have a volatile temperament. He followed up his provincial political career with two terms as a member of parliament.

He lost his seat during the 1882 federal election and retired to Victoria. At the age of 70 in 1895, he was declared insane and he died less than two years later.



"Throughout his life, de Cosmos used his political and journalist voice to advocate for many causes, one of which was free public education."

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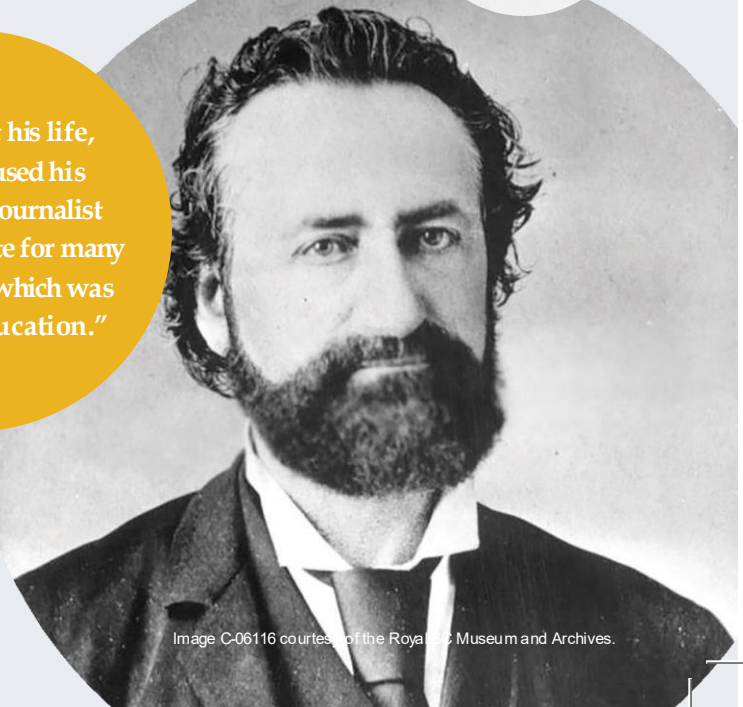


Image C-06116 courtesy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum and Archives.





## Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

# Our first female high school teacher: Agnes Deans Cameron

**A**gnes Deans Cameron was born for a life of adventure. She qualified as a teacher at age 16, graduating from Victoria High School's inaugural class in 1876. Her first public teaching post was a one-room school in Comox, followed quickly by a move to Vancouver. By 1883 she had returned to Victoria where she rose through the ranks at the Girls' School. Cameron did the same at the Boys' School and then went on to Victoria High School as its first female teacher. In 1894, when Cameron became principal of South Park School, she was the first woman to hold an administrative office in a co-ed school in Victoria.

Cameron enjoyed a reputation as an excellent teacher and she was also recognized for her support of the suffragette and pay equity movements. She argued that education should be liberal, rather than designed to train students for jobs. Her strong ideals put her in conflict with educational authorities several times and, in

1905, she and an art teacher were accused of allowing students to use rulers in a freehand drawing exercise. Cameron was dismissed by the school board and a Royal Commission of Inquiry investigated the matter. The commission found against her and her teaching career was over.

Cameron took up writing and, in the summer of 1906, travelled 10,000 miles down the Mackenzie River to become the first Caucasian woman to reach the Arctic Ocean

overland. She followed that with an extensive speaking tour and wrote numerous articles about her adventures. Then a celebrity, Cameron returned to Victoria in 1911, earning good coverage in the press. In May of the following year, she died of pneumonia at age 48.

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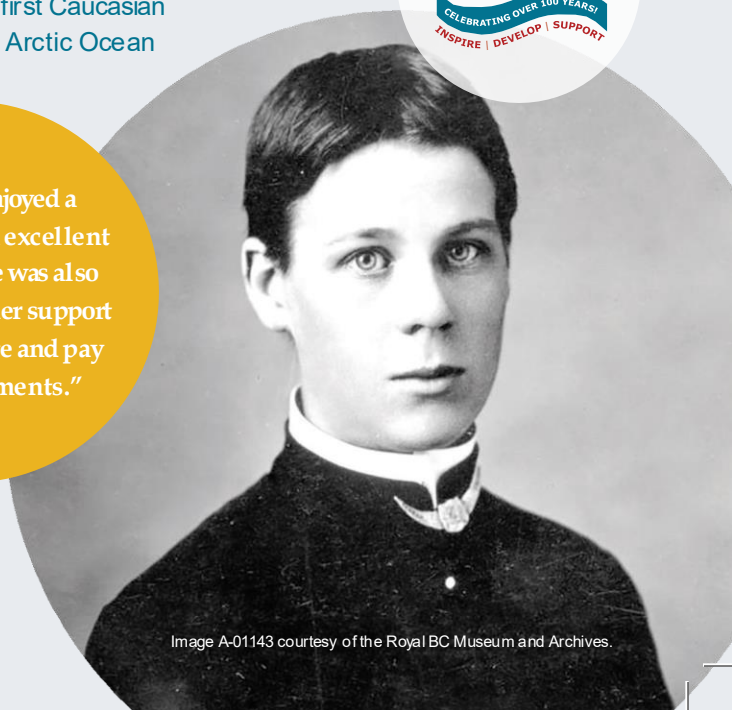


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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1867-1899

### Overseeing great change: Alexander Robinson

When Alexander Robinson was appointed as B.C.'s fourth provincial superintendent of schools in 1899, he was at the helm of a golden era in public schooling. For 20 years his impact was felt far and wide as the province's population increased significantly and led to the need for more schools.

He came to the position via a teaching career that included being the principal of Vancouver High School. His chief rival for the job was the principal of New Westminster High School—a man with supposedly superior qualifications. Despite a public outcry, the government stood by its choice and Robinson ruled with an iron fist for 20 years. He had tremendous influence and power over teachers and school trustees, and served eight premiers and 16 ministers of education.

During his six-day work week, Robinson would typically write 20 to 30 letters a day; at times he signed nearly 100 letters a day.

Over his career as superintendent, he wrote more than 120,000 letters. Under such a centralized system, every request for information or permission was run past "The Chief." A school inspector once said of his boss, "Ministers of Education came and went but Robinson was the Department of Education. There was never any doubt about that."

Robinson's reign came to an end in 1919; he was dismissed by the minister of education who felt

Robinson disregarded his ideas. He was told to leave his office by the following day and was granted an allowance of \$140 a month and three months pay in lieu of notice. Robinson returned to teaching—briefly as principal at Victoria High School and later as an English and Classics teacher in Oak Bay.

**"He had tremendous influence and power over teachers and school trustees, and served eight premiers and 16 ministers of education."**

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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1900-1914

# The Bureaucratic Ruling Class: S.J. Willis

S.J. Willis was a powerful figure in B.C.'s schools; he was able to govern the province's educational affairs with little political oversight. He began his administrative career in 1908 when he was appointed as the principal of Victoria High School, described as "the jewel in the Empire's educational crown."

In 1919, he became the provincial superintendent of schools, effectively trading places with his predecessor, Alexander Robinson. Willis was later called on to investigate the administration of the school under Robinson's leadership, which ultimately led to a request for the latter's resignation in 1921.

Willis was in charge when the government called for a commission of inquiry into the provincial school system and J.H. Putman and G.W. Weir's Survey of the School System was presented to him in 1925. This report introduced progressive ideas about schooling and was widely known to teachers and administrators as

the "new education." At the time, it was one of the most thorough and influential examinations of a Canadian educational system.

The first serious consolidation of rural school territories in B.C. also happened under Willis' purview. Small school districts had often been criticized for their inefficiencies. In the 1930s, the school inspector for the Peace Region originally recommended 39 districts be amalgamated into four administrative units. In 1934,

one group of 14 districts became the Central Peace region.

Willis retired in 1946. He left a system where the provincial government's influence was beginning to wane... a ruling class that was to come increasingly under siege.



"...he was appointed as the principal of Victoria High School, described as "the jewel in the Empire's educational crown."

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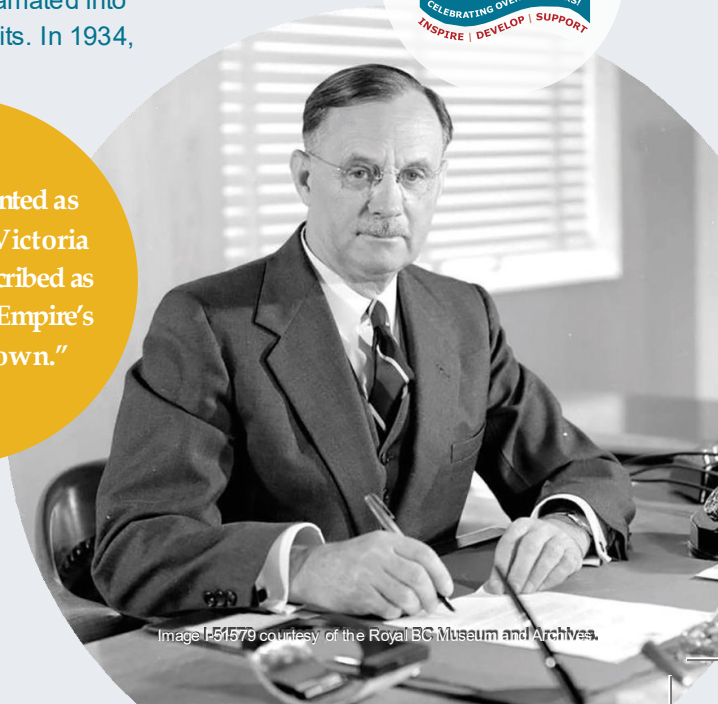


Image I-51579 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

# Schooling in British Columbia: 1900-1914

## BCSSA Historical Timeline



The Vancouver Provincial Normal School is established.

1901

Calls are expressed about the need to amalgamate rural school districts.

1903

S.J. Willis is appointed as principal of Victoria High School. He is later a superintendent and deputy minister of education.

1908

The British Columbia School Trustees Association is formed.

1905

Margaret Strong is appointed as a principal in New Westminster: she later becomes our first female school inspector.

1911

J.B. DeLong begins his long career as a school inspector.

1913

The First World War breaks out in Europe.

1914

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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1900-1914

# Our first—and only—female school inspector

**M**argaret Strong was an exceptional woman: bright and gifted. Her career choice of teaching was not unusual for the time and, in 1911, she came west and immediately assumed the position as principal of New Westminster's Girls School (with an enrollment of 354 girls and 133 boys). More than 50 staff taught in the city at that time; Strong was one of only three with a university education.

In 1912, the Royal City's school trustees requested their own senior school officer separate from the provincial appointee and Strong became the city's first municipal inspector a year later. She was, in effect, Canada's first female school superintendent. She held the post until 1915 and was the only woman to have such a senior leadership role in our province's school system until the 1970s.

Early on in her role as an inspector, Strong came into conflict with the

provincial inspector to whom she was accountable. She resigned following a dispute over the placement and advancement of pupils in the district's various schools and classrooms.

Of her resignation, Strong was quoted in the *British Columbian* as saying, "I could throw my hat up with joy at the way I am leaving the city schools." She returned to her home province of Ontario and

continued her career in education. She earned respect and recognition for her social and educational research and worked with the League of Nations as well as the Rockefeller Foundation.

"She held the post until 1915 and was the only woman to have such a senior leadership role in our province's school system until the 1970s."

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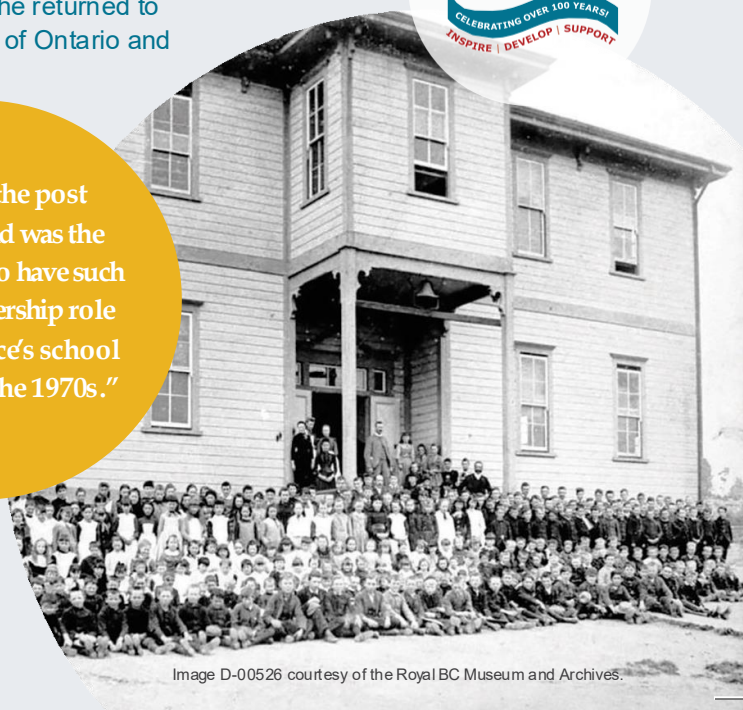


Image D-00526 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.





## Schooling in British Columbia: 1914-1939

# Introducing progressive ideas about schooling

B.C.'s most influential study of provincial schooling in the twentieth century was released in 1925. Authored by J. H. Putman, the senior inspector of schools in Ottawa, and UBC professor of education George Weir, the Survey of the School System reviewed the education system of the time and made several recommendations for improvement. Most of its progressive ideas came from the United States and were eventually adopted. The report was widely known to teachers and administrators as the "new education."

The 556-page document was commissioned by the provincial education minister and superintendent in 1924. It emphasized that the role of the school system is to produce good citizens. Prior to the report, our province's curriculum and instruction was largely influenced by British standards: a classical education. In the post-survey world, education and the method of instruction became

more progressive: more American in style and practice. The report also introduced the idea of large-scale intelligence tests.

Weir went on to become minister of education in 1933. He was likely the first provincial cabinet minister to comprehend the role education has in shaping a government's larger social agenda. In a 1946 issue of British Columbia Schools, Weir wrote:

"In the post-survey world, education and the method of instruction became more progressive: more American in style and practice."

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"[School] may turn out scholars. It may produce successful men of business. It may educate for culture. It may enable its graduates to make a better living. These and other things it may do, but the real test of its accomplishments is the kind of citizen it produces."

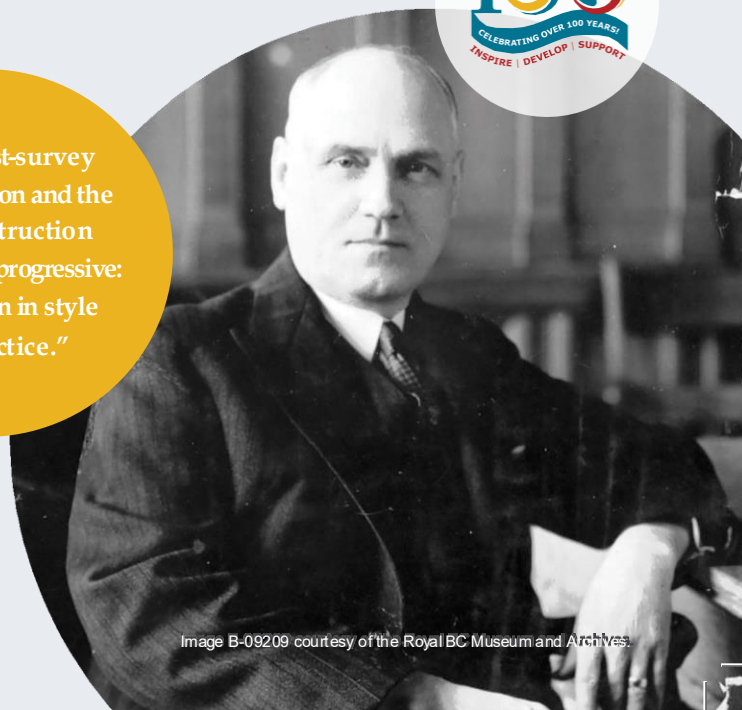


Image B-09209 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives

# Schooling in British Columbia: 1914-1939

## BCSSA Historical Timeline



The First World War  
breaks out in Europe.

**1914**

The Victoria Provincial  
Normal School opens.

**1915**

Several schools are turned into temporary  
hospitals during the influenza pandemic  
known as the Spanish flu.

**1918**

B.C.'s Education Office is  
recognized as a "depart-  
ment" of government.

**1920**

J.H. Putman and G.W. Weir's  
survey of provincial schools  
is published.

**1925**

The British Columbia  
Teachers' Federation is  
founded.

**1919**

Lottie Bowron is  
appointed as a women's  
welfare officer.

**1928**

The Wall Street Crash signals  
the beginning of the 10-year  
Great Depression.

**1929**

There are 830 school  
districts in B.C.

**1932**

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The start  
of World  
War II.

**1939**

H.B. King is appointed technical advisor  
to the minister of education. In 1939 he  
is appointed chief inspector of schools.

**1935**



## Schooling in British Columbia: 1914-1939

# Supporting school mistresses in rural schools

By the 1920s, many young women were teaching in B.C.'s schools. In rural areas, these women were often isolated and vulnerable. Following a public outcry to improve the safety of female teachers, Lottie Bowron was appointed as the province's rural teachers' welfare officer in 1928.

Bowron was the former personal secretary to Premier Richard McBride. Her newly created position was equivalent to a provincial school inspector; she was the first and only woman to hold such a rank since the creation of the Education Office in 1872. She was also the first and only non-educator to become a provincial inspector.

Unlike her colleagues who were responsible for supervising a specific geographical area, Bowron was accountable for the care of all women teachers in rural schools throughout B.C. Hers was the largest educational

territory ever assigned to a single inspector in all of Canada. Bowron's role was also unique in that it was the only time the provincial government intervened directly in the personal lives of its teachers to protect them from the local school boards that employed them.

Bowron provided many reports about the living conditions of

teachers and the conditions of rural schools in the 1930s. These chronicled the challenges for school mistresses made worse by the Great Depression. She visited hundreds of women, wrote many of them encouraging letters, and often sent small gifts of art supplies or books.

"She visited hundreds of women, wrote many of them encouraging letters, and often sent small gifts of art supplies or books."

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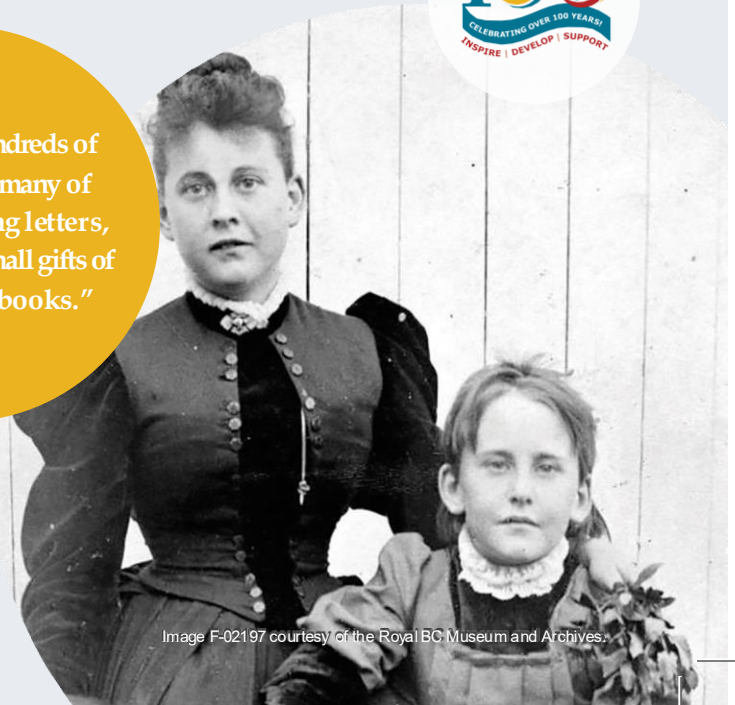
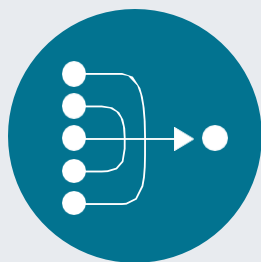


Image F-02197 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.



## Schooling in British Columbia: 1939-1972

# The amalgamation of school districts

With our province's vast geography and the many rural communities that developed in isolation, the number of British Columbian school districts grew to over 800 by the 1940s. Calls for consolidation were raised as early as the late 1800s and rural schools especially were criticized for their inefficient operations. Local communities went to great lengths to keep their schools open, even when attendance dipped well below the minimum number of pupils required. Inequities between rural and urban schools also became more pronounced.

Demands to amalgamate rural districts continued to be expressed intermittently in the early 1900s and were taken seriously by J. H. Putman and George Weir in their influential school survey published in 1925. However, the first consolidation of rural school territories in B.C. did not happen until 1934. The school inspector for the Peace Region recommended 39 districts be amalgam-

ated into four administrative units; one group of 14 districts became the Central Peace region.

The post-war boom period ushered in a period of growth for B.C.'s schools. Immigration and the baby boom created a need for more schools and led to a severe teacher shortage. In the midst of these and other factors, the province's 800-plus school districts were combined into 89 larger districts in the 1946-47 school year. This move was designed to create

administrative efficiencies as well as greater equality between schools. Two of the consequences were the rise of more powerful school boards and influential trustee associations that demanded greater control over their districts' schools.



*"Calls for consolidation were raised as early as the late 1800s and rural schools especially were criticized for their inefficient operations."*

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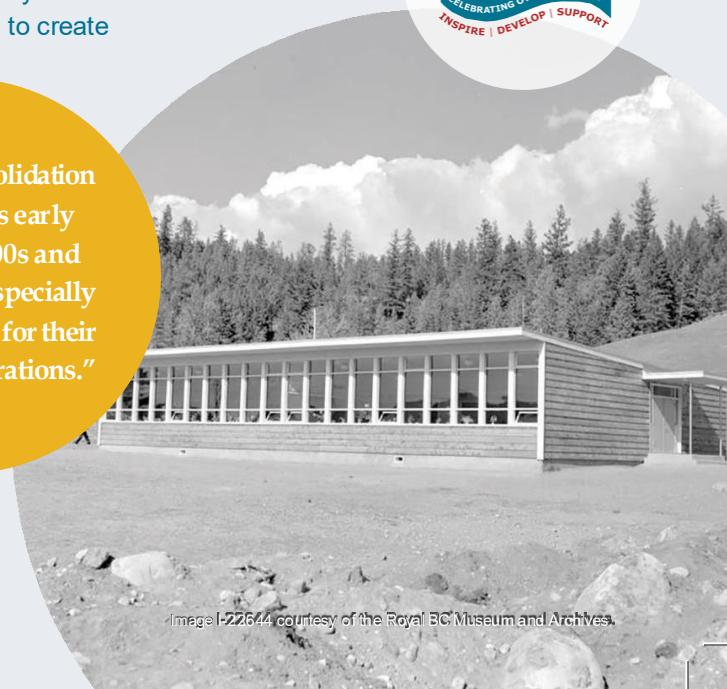


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# Schooling in British Columbia: 1939-1972

## BCSSA Historical Timeline



The start of World War II.

**1939**

Japanese-Canadian families in B.C. are moved to internment camps.

**1942**

The Second World War ends.

**1945**

B.C.'s 800+ school districts are consolidated into 89 larger districts.

**1946-47**

First Nations in B.C. receive the right to vote in provincial elections.

**1949**

The British Columbia Royal Commission on Education is released. Residential schools begin to close.

**1960**

The position of school inspector is replaced by government-appointed district superintendents.

**1958**

The Soviet Union launches the Sputnik satellite.

**1957**

An article in The B.C. Teacher calls for provisions for maternity leave.

**1963**

Frank Levirs is made superintendent of education.

**1965**

Frances Fleming becomes the first female administrator in a Vancouver secondary school.

**1969**

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The BCTF uses its resources to help elect the NDP.

**1972**

The provincial education budget equals the entire provincial budget of nine years earlier.

**1970-71**





## Schooling in British Columbia: 1939-1972

# Moving mountains and changing history: Frank Calder

As a young child, Frank Calder's destiny was foretold. He was presented to a gathering of Elders discussing the "immovable mountain": Nisga'a land claims. There, the story is told, Chief Nagwa'un famously stated, "This boy is going to learn the laws of the K'amksiiwaa, the white people. And when he comes home, he's going to move the mountain."

Calder was sent away to the Coqualeetza Residential School in Sardis when he was seven years old, returning to the Nass Valley every summer to fish with his father or work in the cannery. He went on to become the first status Indian to study at Chilliwack High School and broke through another glass ceiling as the first status Indian to attend UBC. He graduated from theological college in 1946 but decided not to pursue a religious calling.

He chose, instead, politics. In 1949—the same year that Indigenous people in B.C. received the right to vote in provincial elections—Calder was elected to the legislature. He was the first Indigenous

person to be elected to any legislature in Canada as well as the first appointed as a minister. Calder was an MLA for 26 years.

Shortly after being elected, Calder started working towards re-opening land claim discussions and establishing treaties. In addition to serving as an MLA, he was the first president of the Nisga'a Tribal Council that was formed in 1955. Calder held that position for 20 years.

Calder is most famous for the 1973 Supreme Court of Canada

decision that bears his name: Calder vs. Attorney General of British Columbia. The case, which was argued by Thomas Berger, established for the first time that Aboriginal title exists in modern Canadian law. The decision had national and international ramifications and served as the basis of B.C.'s Nisga'a Treaty—our province's first modern treaty.

"This boy is going to learn the laws of the K'amksiiwaa, the white people. And when he comes home, he's going to move the mountain."

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## Schooling in British Columbia: 1939-1972

### A woman in a man's world

While women have been part of our province's education system since its beginning, they have also faced many more barriers than their male counterparts. Frances Fleming was a trailblazer whose career included many firsts for women including the first female administrator in a Vancouver secondary school and our first female provincial school superintendent.

Fleming graduated from Vancouver Normal School in 1932 but was unable to find work in her field—at the time there were 750 out-of-work teachers in B.C. She was a mother of three living in Stave Falls in 1944 when the local school board offered her a position. Despite receiving excellent reviews, Fleming was given a letter of dismissal because “the boys would be back from war and taking over their own jobs.”

She was later invited to start a special class at Kingsway West in Burnaby. Fleming again received a glowing report but, when she inquired about tenure, was told

the board did not want married women on staff. She resigned.

Fleming's family relocated often, following her husband's career. When they returned to Burnaby in 1948, she was a long-term substitute in Vancouver and was offered a one-year contract to teach special education. For the next six years, she received excellent reports in May, was fired in June, and rehired in August. This workaround was necessary given the policy against hiring married women.

After several years that alternated between teaching and

being a student herself, Fleming was appointed vice principal at Magee Secondary, thus becoming Vancouver's first female high school administrator. She went on to become a school superintendent in Quesnel; her pioneering work earned her the Order of British Columbia and a UBC Alumni Award of Distinction.

“Frances Fleming was a trailblazer whose career included many firsts for women...”

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information visit  
**bcssa.org**



Burnaby Village Museum, Anthony's of Kamistdale photograph, BV015.13.116



## Schooling in British Columbia: 1972-2010

# Superintendents become local school district employees

The 1972 provincial election saw the BC Teachers Federation use its resources to help elect the NDP, with former teacher and school board trustee Eileen Dailly appointed the minister of education. It was a defining moment and marked a division between the 100-year-old tradition of centralized control and a new, devolved style of governing. The consequences were enormous for teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

The roots of decentralization began with the amalgamation of school districts in the 1940s. That led to more powerful school boards and trustees who wanted more control over their schools. The social activism of the 1960s compounded the desire for individual rights and freedoms. The time was ripe to transfer responsibility to a more local level of authority.

In 1974 the government granted seven of the province's 75 school districts permission to hire school

leaders of their choice. School superintendents began leaving the provincial civil service to become employees of local districts. Financial compensation was a deciding factor for many; however, there was less security at the local level.

By 1980, the *School Act Regulations* were amended to permit all school boards with enrollment of more than 250 students to

appoint a local superintendent of schools. It ushered in a turbulent period of adjustment. Over the next decade, close to half of the province's 129 school superintendents left their positions for other jobs in education in and outside B.C.



"It was a defining moment and marked a division between the 100-year-old tradition of centralized control and a new, devolved style of governing."

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Image I-32450 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.



# Schooling in British Columbia: 1972-2010

## BCSSA Historical Timeline

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*Inspiring, developing  
& supporting senior  
leadership in public  
education for over  
100 years.*

The BCTF uses its resources to help elect the NDP.

1972

The government grants seven of the province's 75 school districts permission to hire school leaders of their choice.

1974

The Nisga'a School District is created.

1975

The provincial government develops a learning assessment program.

1977

The special program branch of the Ministry of Education is reorganized to facilitate disabled children being integrated into schools.

1978

A Royal Commission on Education produces its report: A Legacy for Learners.

1988

Education Minister Jack Heinrich establishes a provincial school review committee.

1985

Provincial exams are re-introduced.

1984

The School Act Regulations are amended to permit all school boards with enrollment of more than 250 students to appoint a local superintendent of schools.

1980

The government launches an ambitious school reform initiative: the Year 2000 program.

1989

The last of the provincially employed district superintendents retires.

1994

The Year 2000 program is cancelled.

1995

A First Nations Education Action Plan envisions the development and implementation of sustainable education systems under the full control and jurisdiction of First Nations.

2005

The Assembly of First Nations launches a national call to action on education.

2010

The B.C. Ministry of Education, the Vancouver School Board, UBC, the Musqueam Nation, the Métis Nation, Coast Salish Nations, and the Urban Aboriginal People sign the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

2009

The Assembly of First Nations calls on the federal government to address the First Nations' education crisis.

2006



## Schooling in British Columbia: 1939-1972

# The creation of the Nisga'a School District

On the heels of the Supreme Court of Canada's Calder Decision in 1973 that established Aboriginal title, Indigenous peoples in B.C. began seeking greater control over many aspects of their lives including education. The first step towards this was the creation of the Nisga'a School District in the Nass Valley on January 1, 1975.

Today the region's publicly funded schools include three elementary and one elementary and secondary school in Kincolith, Greenville, Gitwinksilkw, and Aiyansh. The Nisga'a School District is unique in that all students are from the Nisga'a Nation and share the same language and culture. Students learn to become fluent Nisga'a speakers and focus on reflecting the welcoming nature of the Nisga'a people and culture.

The Nisga'a School Board has four Nisga'a members (each representing a Nisga'a village) and one non-Nisga'a member. The Nisga'a Lisims Government works with the school district to foster and protect the Nisga'a language and culture and is

committed to improving the education system for learners of all ages.

Huxwdii adigwil yukwhl siwilaak-sim': learning is a way of life.

"The Nisga'a School District is unique in that all students are from the Nisga'a Nation and share the same language and culture."

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