

“May the Lord Have Mercy on You”: The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s*

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In September 1919 John Gibbard, fresh out of Vancouver Normal School, took up his first teaching post in a one-room school in Steelhead, a logging community eight miles north of Mission in the lower Fraser Valley. Arriving to inspect the school, he opened the desk drawer to find a note from his predecessor whose salutation began: “May the Lord have mercy on you.”¹ Gibbard and hundreds of other British Columbia rural teachers in the 1920s would come to understand during their tenure the full meaning of this cryptic greeting. The purpose of this study is to try to convey some sense of the life of a teacher in remote corners of the province in the 1920s and the nature of rural teaching conditions. Second, it discusses in some detail the various solutions to the rural school problem proposed by educational bureaucrats in the Department of Education and other educational reformers in the same time period. The essay attempts, therefore, to be both descriptive of a situation not much studied and analytical in a way that might contribute to a better understanding of the province’s educational history in the twentieth century.²

I

Recent work in Canadian educational history has not been much concerned either with the content of schooling or with the responses engen-

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¹ Interview with John Gibbard, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, 24 February 1986. Gibbard was sometime professor in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia.

² By “rural” we do not mean “agricultural,” rather the land and people living outside the boundaries of incorporated urban centres, namely hamlets, villages, towns, and cities. In 1921, by this definition, 277,000 of 524,000 residents of British Columbia lived in rural areas. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, 1 (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1936), 364-69.

dered from parents and students. Instead, the emphasis has been on the "big picture": the urban school, the creation of structures, big reform movements, and the sweep of change. Not much attention has been given to the history of textbooks, the nature of the curriculum, the life and pedagogical styles of the average teacher, the role of the inspector, and the place of the student. George Tomkins's *magnum opus* on the history of curriculum in Canada, *A Common Countenance* (Toronto, 1986), was a welcome exception to this state of affairs. As well, recent work by Neil Sutherland focusing on what it was like to be a student in interwar Vancouver underlines the value of bringing children as clients of the school into the historical picture.³

In this article we turn to the world of teachers, in particular rural teachers or more accurately teachers in remote schools in rural British Columbia in the 1920s. In a sense we are picking up the decade-old challenge laid down by John Calam in his presidential address before the U.S. History of Education Society when he pleaded with historians to ensure "that the teacher in history lives and breathes once more."⁴ In the last few years Alison Prentice and the late Marta Danylewycz have demonstrated in a series of important articles the value of studying the history of teachers in this country.⁵ While their studies have concentrated on central Canada and urban teachers, we turn to Canada's west coast and rural teachers in the decade of the 1920s, a slightly later period than the focus of their work. Since by this time the classroom teacher was predominantly female, this study also has pertinence to the history of women in Canada.

In a recent book David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot sought to characterize turning points in U.S. educational history by reference to three different

³ Neil Sutherland, "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s," in R. A. J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986); "Everyone seemed happy in those days': the Culture of Childhood in Vancouver Between the 1920s and the 1960s," *History of Education Review* 15, no. 2 (1986): 37-51.

⁴ John Calam, "A Letter from Quesnel: The Teacher in History, and Other Fables," *History of Education Quarterly* XV, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 142.

⁵ Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice, "Revising the History of Teachers; A Canadian Perspective," *Interchange* XVII, no. 2 (1986): 135-46; Alison Prentice, "From Household to School House: The Emergence of the Teacher as Servant of the State," *Material History Bulletin* 20: 19-29; Danylewycz, Beth Light, and Prentice, "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; Danylewycz and Prentice, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto," *History of Education Quarterly* XX, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 75-100; Danylewycz and Prentice, "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.

types of school architecture. The school in our own era, a "sprawling one-storey complex" in an expanding suburb, is often confused with a shopping or service centre, equally "eclectic in offering something to everybody, blurred in purpose, adapted to the anomic consumerism and possessive individualism of a postindustrial middle class." The early twentieth century is characterized by the large urban high school "often looking like a hard-edged factory with pilasters, visually representing the union of an attenuated traditional culture with a dominant utilitarianism . . . an archetype of the ideal of social efficiency." The nineteenth century is represented by the one-room school, "the symbol of the common-school movement . . . reflecting its chiefly rural character, and its Protestant-republican ideology of creating the nation in the hearts and minds of individual citizens."⁶ The one-room school in British Columbia in the 1920s held much the same place in the hearts and minds of rural British Columbians.⁷

II

In the aftermath of World War I the rural schools of British Columbia did not escape the scrutiny of the educational bureaucracy in the provincial

⁶ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 4-5.

⁷ A systematic study of the rural schools in British Columbia has yet to be written. In particular, the secondary literature is scanty for the period between 1920 and 1930. Research encompasses 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," *BC Studies* 39 (Autumn 1978): 30-60, and Jones, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chilliwack, B.C., 1919-1920," *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, ed. D. C. Jones, N. M. Sheehan, and R. M. Stamp (Calgary: Detselig, 1979), 71-89; the failure of curriculum designed specifically for rural instruction. See Jones, "The Little Mound of Earth — The Fate of School Agriculture," *The Curriculum in Canada in Historical Perspective* (CSSE Yearbook, 1979), 85-94; teacher training and its deficiencies. See John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools," *BC Studies* 61 (Spring 1984): 30-63, and Jones, "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers: The British Columbian Experience, 1914-1924," *Shaping the Schools*, ed. D. C. Jones et al., 155-76; and general anecdotal treatises on the nature of rural school life, interesting but not very substantial. See Jean Cochrane, *The One Room School in Canada* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1981), *passim*, and Joan Adams and Becky Thomas, *Floating Schools and Frozen Inkwells: The One-Room Schools of British Columbia* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1985). See also for other regions, Robert S. Patterson, "Voices From the Past: The Personal and Professional Struggle of Rural School Teachers," in N. M. Sheehan, J. D. Wilson, and D. C. Jones, eds., *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History* (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), chap. 6; Phillip McCann, ed., *Blackboards and Briefcases: Personal Stories by Newfoundland Teachers, Educators and Administrators* (St. John's: Jespersen Press, 1982). Although the research material is not abundant, the remote school must be considered at its most basic levels: the teacher, pupils, and community life. A more intimate sense of the school can therefore be constructed, as well as a

capital of Victoria. For the time, education occupied a relatively favoured status in comparison with other social services provided by the state. By 1920 British Columbians had benefited from the existence of a state-run public school system for almost half a century. The attention accorded rural schools came within the framework of an intensely introspective post-war society dominated by progressive thought embodied in the "New Education" movement.⁸ Every structural and philosophical assumption underlying the school system was coming into question, and the rural school was given special consideration as a unique form of education separate from municipal (that is, small town or village) and urban schools. Its educational and social functions made its reform a distinct problem, and this concern was evident in both the inspectors' annual reports and the survey of provincial education undertaken by John Harold Putman and George Weir in 1924.

Earlier, around 1910, the New Education movement (later referred to as progressive education) had been very much preoccupied with the need for schools in rural areas to promote rural regeneration, but as a result of economic realities (rural poverty and urban industrialization) and demography (rural depopulation) the movement entered into a second phase characterized by vocational training in urban schools. The third phase, starting in the 1920s, blurred urban and rural differences as education moved towards a distinctly practical curriculum geared towards the talents of the individual child. Progressivism formed the basic theme with the belief that each student was capable of certain predictable achievements and should be taught appropriately. Hence the growing reliance on intelligence tests. This complemented well the development of specialized courses of study. Progressive thought in education formed much of education policy-making in the 1920s and 1930s, and was directly responsible for the increased demand for a comprehensive study of the province's educational system which came to fruition in the Putman-Weir Report published in 1925.

Many provincial administrators in education voiced concern in the face of increased urbanization and industrialization over the preservation of

clear analysis of attempts at rural reform. This perspective is essential if the large gaps in rural school historiography are to be filled.

⁸ See B. Anne Wood, "Hegelian Resolutions in the New Education Movement: The 1925 Putman-Weir Report," *Dalhousie Review* 62, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 254-77. The "new education" movement in its incipient stage 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" (254).

what they perceived as superior rural values. John Wesley Gibson, the Director of Agricultural Education in British Columbia, was at the forefront of the movement for rural regeneration and for slowing rural depopulation. The phenomenon of rural depopulation prompted national concern before 1920. The intensity of prewar concerns was evidenced by the passage of the Agricultural Instruction Act in 1913. Gibson attributed a spiritual nature to his plan for agricultural instruction in schools, and asserted repeatedly that rural values must be protected and inculcated in all students in order to save the rural areas as well as to encourage the moral education of urban students.⁹ To many Department of Education officials, the rural schools were the last bastion where the values of a pure and uncontaminated society could be taught. The efficiency of the rural schools, therefore, became a pressing subject. A. R. Lord of the Kelowna inspectorate only slightly exaggerated when he noted in 1920 that "the rural-school problem is the most serious question confronting educational administration in this Province."¹⁰ The combination, to quote another source, of "improper and useless buildings, inefficient apparatus and incompetent teachers or officials" created a situation where "there are in the aggregate hundreds of children . . . attending schools who as a result of distance, weather, outside work, physical defect, are receiving merest scraps of education."¹¹

Throughout the 1920s approximately 20 percent of all pupils in British Columbia attended small rural schools, both rural and assisted, as they were designated. The rural school was typically one-room, was geographically isolated, had a small and sometimes fluctuating pupil attendance, and experienced a rapid turnover of teaching personnel. Two administrative statuses existed: rural and assisted schools. Rural status implied 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 and a grant for school equip-

⁹ See Belle Gibson, *Teacher Builder: The Life and Work of J. W. Gibson* (Victoria: Morriss Printing, 1961), and David C. Jones, "Agriculture, the Land and Education: British Columbia, 1914-1919" (E.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978). On the belief in the superior moral qualities of the countryside at the time of the founding of UBC, see R. Cole Harris, "Locating the University of British Columbia," *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976-77): 106-25.

¹⁰ British Columbia, Department of Education, *Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1920*, C34 (hereafter *AR*). At times, the inspectors referred to both rural and assisted schools simply as "rural," and for convenience we shall repeat this practice in this article. John Calam, emeritus professor of education at UBC, is currently conducting a study of Lord.

¹¹ *AR*, 1918, 32-33.

ment and supplies were underwritten entirely by the provincial government. Provision of the schoolroom or building was the responsibility of the parents and other interested persons. A monthly enrolment of at least ten and an average daily attendance of not less than eight was essential to avoid closure.¹² In 1926 the assisted schools outnumbered the rural schools by three to one. Of the 574 one-roomed schools in the province, 88 percent were classified as assisted, while the remaining 12 percent were rural.¹³ Conversely, out of a total of 521 assisted schools, 504 were one-room while just 70 of the 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.

Most assisted school districts had a local assessment to supplement the provincial grant and the voluntary labour of the community employed to construct and maintain the school. In such cases a property tax was levied on the residents according to the school's particular needs, subject to the approval of the Provincial Assessor.¹⁴ The level of local support differed from community to community. Between 1918 and 1930 in the Bulkley and Nechako valleys in north-central B.C., a typical rural district, the average contribution paid by those communities with tax assessments was only \$221.57 with a recorded low of \$13.10 in Fort Fraser in 1919 and a high of \$1,239.07 paid by the residents of Quick in 1922. Incidentally, the average operating budget, including the teacher's salary, for all the one-room schools in this particular region was \$1,179.49.¹⁵

No more apt description of the variety of B.C. rural schools is likely to be found than in the following from the Putman-Weir Report:

Many are in remote and lonely places beside a lake, under a towering mountain capped with snow, or on an arid plateau where all vegetation is brown and dusty. Some are on beautiful but lonely islands in the Pacific, where the settler is part farmer, part fisherman, and part lumberman. Some are on steep

¹² *Revised Statutes of B.C.* (1924), chap. 226, sections 25, 31, 110. In order to get the government grant, local parents were often ingenious in their definition of "school age." One memoir reports: "my youngest sister, age two, was enrolled and taken to school [Kaleden] every day." H. W. Corbitt, *The History of Kaleden* (Penticton: Kaleden Centennial Committee, 1958), 7. Boys in their late teens also enrolled in September; it allowed them the additional opportunity to size up the new female teacher. In actual fact many assisted schools operated in the 1920s with fewer than eight pupils average attendance. Often, the inspectors got around the stipulation by reporting, for example, that "more pupils are expected next month."

¹³ The number of assisted schools was 521. Figures for 1920-1925 are not obtainable because the lists in the *AR* did not distinguish between rural and assisted schools.

¹⁴ *Revised Statutes of B.C.* (1924), chap. 226, sections 113, 119-22.

¹⁵ Calculations based on information found in the *Statistical Tables* in the *Annual Reports*, 1918-1930. See Paul Stortz, "The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920's" (M.A. thesis, UBC, 1988), chap. 4.

mountain sides in "Company Towns", where tall chimneys of pulp-mill or smelter form the center of a busy industrial life. Some are close to the water on an arm of the sea, which is the outlet of a salmon river and the site of a canning-factory, and some stand on ground over coal-mines. Some have ideal surroundings, but the school buildings themselves are primitive and very small. Many are built of logs. Some are not larger than 15 by 18 feet with a ceiling just above your head. Some have attractive grounds, some have bare and unattractive yards, and some are built on rocks. . . . Some of these buildings are tidy and clean inside and some sadly in need of paint, whitewash and soap.¹⁶

One scholar of Canadian school architecture has concluded that B.C.'s assisted schools were "probably, by 1930, inferior to similar schools in the other western provinces," and John Thompson and Allen Seager speak quite correctly of the one-room school in interwar Canada as "in too many instances a pedagogical charnelhouse."¹⁷

Among the many problems associated with the rural school, the progressive-minded educators of the era were most often concerned with the academic retardation of the students. Retardation was antithetical to the progressives' idea of an efficient school system. The perfection of the schools in the province could only be realized when every student was at the grade level where he/she should be, that is, categorized accurately by intelligence, and subsequently directed to an appropriate programme of study in accordance with his/her talents. This would ensure the smooth transition of the student in his/her proper niche in society, what a Langley high school principal described in 1930 as "an integral and smoothly functioning cog of industrial and social progress."¹⁸ Retardation was an aberration of this process as it implied that the student was not properly graded and, hence, properly educated. The school inspectors and the commissioners of the Putman-Weir Report discovered that rural, and especially assisted school, students were less "intelligent" than their urban counterparts according to the proper grade levels 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

¹⁶ J. H. Putman and G. M. Weir, *Survey of the School System* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1925), 20. Hereafter the Putman-Weir Report will be referred to as the *Survey*.

¹⁷ Ivan J. Saunders, "A Survey of British Columbia School Architecture to 1930," *Research Bulletin* (Parks Canada) 225 (November 1984): 14; John H. Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 156.

¹⁸ Quoted in Timothy A. Dunn, "The Rise of Mass Public Schooling in British Columbia, 1900-1929," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary: Detselig, 1980), 23.

below that of pupils in the other schools of the district."¹⁹ The Putman-Weir *Survey* contained elaborate retardation statistics which showed that the average number of months a pupil was behind in his/her course work in relation to age was 22.7 in assisted schools (almost two years!) as opposed to 15.7 and 8.07 in elementary rural and city schools respectively. Also fully half, 53.7 percent of pupils, in assisted schools were overage in respect to their proper grade.²⁰ For an educational system that was intended to be cost-effective, scientifically run, and generally efficient, these statistics were unsettling indeed.

The blame for the rural school problem was placed squarely on the teacher. In both the Department of Education's annual reports (henceforth *AR*) and the Putman-Weir *Survey*, the amount of attention given rural school teachers was as much a testimony to their importance as it was a condemnation of their pedagogical effectiveness. The rural school teacher was easy to isolate because she — it was most often a woman²¹ — was the manager of the schoolhouse. As that manager she wore many hats. She was a role model for the students, usually the caretaker of the facility, ideally a leader in the community where she was expected to help formulate school and community policy, and also the local representative of the Department of Education between the inspector's annual or biennial visits. Most important, she was the educator expected to create a stimulating atmosphere conducive to maximum learning. She was solely responsible for the standard of the schooling each student received. J. T. Pollock of the Vancouver Inspectorate No. 3 wrote that "it is . . . the teacher's duty to study, work, and arouse the child's interests; that the pupils must be led to cultivate, among other good habits, accuracy and the power to make intense application."²²

Schools and teachers were extremely important socializing agents in the remote areas of the province. Such districts often lacked the amenities of urban life including Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, C.G.I.T. (Canadian Girls in Training), and other church-based clubs, as well as the recreational centres and organized playgrounds that by the 1920s were becoming quite the rage in urban areas. In rural B.C. the school was one of the few public gathering places specifically designed to educate and socialize children.

Although it was imperative to keep up friendly relations with the local

¹⁹ *AR*, 1920, C27.

²⁰ *Survey*, 252, 128-31.

²¹ According to the 1925 *AR*, 79 percent of the rural and assisted school teachers listed (n = 903) were female. Thus, for convenience, throughout this paper the teacher will be referred to in the feminine pronoun.

²² *AR*, 1921, F23.

school board if her classroom authority was not to be interfered with, the school was the teacher's domain. Like its Ontario prototype, the local school board was composed of three trustees elected by the local ratepayers and exercised considerable authority over the day-to-day operation of the school within the general guidelines established by the Department. The local school board hired the teacher, set the teacher's salary, and controlled the expenditure of funds for the daily operation of the school.

Was the authorities' blame on the teacher for the rural school problem well placed? Both the *Survey* and the *AR* drew attention to the teacher's lack of qualifications and preparation to work in remote areas, but evidence suggests that the problem was far more complex. The teacher's age, gender, and marital status were important determinants of her effectiveness, as were the economic and social conditions of each particular community on school efficiency. The reformers and inspectors failed to realize that not even the best-trained teacher had much chance of success against the restlessness of rural youth and the impoverishment and transiency of local communities.

The rural school problem becomes clear by examining its solutions proposed in the *AR* and the *Survey* together with two sets of teacher-completed questionnaires known as the Teachers' Bureau Records (henceforth *TBR*).²³ The Teachers' Bureau was set up by the Department of Education in 1920 and placed in charge of the Department's Registrar, J. L. Watson. Its main responsibility was to act as a sort of teachers' exchange, providing names of suitable candidates to rural school boards anxious to hire teachers as well as acquainting teachers with rural school vacancies. In the school year 1922-23, notices of approximately 300 vacancies were received, over 200 of which were filled by teachers selected by the Bureau at the request of the school boards.²⁴ Because the information the questionnaires contain is so detailed — salary, boarding costs, condition of school, living conditions, relations with board and parents, etc. — they throw a great deal of light on the rural teachers' impressions of their lot and the exigencies of their job. The existent *TBR* straddle the appearance of the *Survey* in 1925. About 700 questionnaires are available in the PABC in each of the two years 1923 and 1928. This allows for some comparisons of the 1923 set with the conditions of the rural schools detailed in the *Survey* while the

²³ The *Teachers' Bureau Records* are officially known as *School District Information Forms for the Teachers' Bureau*, Department of Education, Victoria, B.C. Hereafter, they will be referred to as the *TBR*. They are located at Provincial Archives of B.C. (PABC), GR 461 and are organized alphabetically by school and year (1923 and 1928).

²⁴ *AR*, 1922, C11; 1923, F11.

TBR completed in 1928 help form conclusions as to whether any changes occurred in conditions as a result of the recommendations proposed by the *Survey*.

The teachers' responses to their physical and teaching environment varied greatly. Some complained about everything down to the mosquitoes in the summer. Some responded rather unenthusiastically with a singular adjective — the weather, pupils, parents, trustees, salary, school, and school grounds were all "fair" — while others appeared elated over their teaching prospects and the natural beauty of their surroundings. A number criticized their situations in some detail. At Burgoyne Bay on the west coast of Saltspring Island, "many of the residents," the teacher complained, "have the attitude that 'what was good for them forty years ago is good enough for the children of today.'" At the fish cannery of Kildonan, west of Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, Abigail Nicholson found the community rather rowdy. Her problem was exacerbated by the fact that she resided in a small room (8' by 18') backing onto the school. Since the school was used for many community functions, such as church services and dances, she found she often had to put up with "many disagreeable annoyances."

At present, I have to eat, sleep, cook, dry clothes, etc. in just this little room, which is by no means healthy, not very much sunlight as it is behind school, also *noisy dances* which are frequently held, school room is outrageously abused. Men smoke and throw matches, partly used cigarettes, cigars on floor, desks, blackboard ledges. As the room is low shaped thus, it takes a long time to air it out and after a Saturday night's diversion, the pupils and myself have to endure the impure air most of the next week, in spite of me having the door and windows open during the weekend.²⁵

To be sure, each school and teacher were different, and the accuracy of the reports, taken individually, is impossible to verify. While many teachers enjoyed their rural experiences and some actually married local men and women and settled down in the community, most spent a short time there, a year or two at most. Often born and bred in urban British Columbia, they had little opportunity to acquire a genuine "feel" for the community or its inhabitants. Their intention was to complete their tour of duty and move on to the next, superior posting or, in some cases, to marriage and family. Their impressions of local life then may well have been quite superficial. On the other hand, the *TBR* do provide a legitimate perspective from a participant viewpoint and, when used together with the inspectors' reports summarized in the *AR* and with the observations of

²⁵ *TBR*, Harold J. Bradley, Burgoyne Bay, 1928; Abigail Nicholson, Kildonan, 1928.

the education experts, Putman and Weir, provide quite a fascinating tripartite view of a similar set of circumstances. All told, it seems reasonable to suppose that the impressions recorded by the teachers were for the most part sincere and reflected the actual situation at least as the teacher perceived it.

The other major sources, the *AR* and the Putman-Weir *Survey*, diverged widely from each other. In sharp contrast to the *Survey* the *AR* gave favourable descriptions of the rural schools and teachers (and for that matter of the entire educational system). This discrepancy can be partially explained, however, by understanding the purposes of these two sources. The *Survey* was commissioned by the Department of Education as a comprehensive stock-taking of the entire educational system. Its function was to recommend necessary changes to make the system as efficient as possible. The *Survey'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, [rather] than to praise the qualities of the many able teachers found in the schools in the Province."²⁶ The *Survey* examined in detail the nature of each problem and offered specific solutions.

A closer look at the authors of the *Survey*, however, reveals important biases that may have distorted their portrait of the rural school. Dr. J. Harold Putman and Dr. George M. Weir entered the educational scene in British Columbia with national reputations. Both had earned doctorates in education and were actively involved in educational research and administration. Putman came from Ottawa, where he was chief inspector of schools, and Weir, a professor of education at the University of British Columbia, from Saskatchewan, where he had been principal of the Saskatoon Normal School. Their removal from the administrative machinery of the Department of Education in Victoria permitted them to distance themselves from the province's educational bureaucracy. In brief, their comments placed neither their survey nor their jobs in jeopardy: their pens were free to commend or condemn. But the *Survey's* authors were not unbiased. Putman and Weir were liberal and progressive, and the *Survey* was deeply influenced by their philosophic outlook. Whatever did not fit into their idea of progressive pedagogy was censured.²⁷ During the com-

²⁶ *Survey*, 132.

²⁷ See the *Survey*, 24-70. For a comprehensive study of Putman, see B. Anne Wood, *Idealism Transformed: The Making of a Progressive Educator* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985). Weir had considerable educational experience in Saskatchewan before coming to UBC. From being head of the History Department at Saskatoon Collegiate Institute he passed quickly (within a year) through being a school inspector to becoming a staff member at the new Saskatoon

missioners' whirlwind fact-finding tour of the province in 1924-25, the public became aware from the various public meetings held that the commissioners had "embarked on the task with preconceived notions and not with an open mind."²⁸ The ultimate result was an administrative report heavily laden with cynicism and sarcasm, and disproportionately negative in relation to the real situation.

While the *Survey* was hampered by ideological biases, the *AR* suffered from political and administrative connections. The inspectors whose evaluations formed the basis of the *AR* were expected to report annually on the general state of affairs, both good and bad, in each district by describing the conditions and problems of local schools. However, as part of the bureaucracy, they were tied intimately to the Department of Education and their views were valued highly in teaching circles. Thus, their negative comments were more likely to be damaging to colleagues with whom they were in constant contact. For example, normal school staffs often included ex-inspectors; as a result, any condemnation of the quality of the rural and assisted school teachers could be seen as an indirect criticism of members and friends of their own profession.²⁹ Over the years a close network evolved among B.C. school inspectors, all but one of whom between 1887 and 1958 were men.³⁰ They not only sensed where their loyalties lay; they also realized their own advance up the bureaucratic ladder from their current middle management status constituted a sort of *cursus honorum*. Loyalty to those around and above you plus a modicum of merit usually found its reward.³¹

So while the *AR* described, the *Survey* explained, and in this way the *Survey* appeared far more critical than the *AR*. The difference was in emphasis, not content. Both sources studied the same thing, problems associated with the rural school, but with different intentions and levels of analysis. Thus taken together with the *TBR*, we have a second and third perspective on the rural school.

Normal School in 1912. Saskatoon, *Annual Reports of the Public Schools*, 1911, 16; 1912, 5, 65; 1913, 35; 1918, 58-61.

²⁸ Wood, "Hegelian Resolutions," 259.

²⁹ Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," 53-63.

³⁰ Thomas Fleming, "'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," in *Schools in the West*, chap. 15.

³¹ One historian, speaking of Ontario, has graphically characterized inspectors' reports as that "rich underworld of male administrative culture." John Abbott, "Accomplishing 'a Man's Task': Rural Women Teachers, Male Culture, and the School Inspectorate in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario," *Ontario History* 78, no. 4 (December 1986): 313-30.

III

Both the *Survey* and the *AR* identified the teacher as the basic reason for the problem of the rural school, and in particular they blamed pupil retardation on archaic teaching practices. Isolated from the New Education and unwilling to update her education through summer school,³² the rural teacher “lost [her] studious habits” and fell “into the rut of old-fogeyism, routine and drudgery.”³³ She sustained “formalism” — an undue stress on drill, memorization, and routine — which was especially condemned by the *Survey* as the nemesis of 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. 4 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.³⁴

As usual, the *Survey* was more explicit and the language became particularly florid on an issue so central to the commissioners’ progressive concerns.

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 [the commissioners preferred the masculine pronoun] 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.

³² In the first five years of the decade, many inspectors commented on the teachers’ lack of enthusiasm to attend summer school. See especially *AR*, 1921, F63; 1922, C27; 1923, F29, F38; and 1924, T50.

³³ *Survey*, 132. It seems certain that inadequate teacher supervision was a reason for the teacher’s poor pedagogical practices. One annual inspectorial visit was often the norm in more isolated schools. See the *Survey*, 133, 252-56. For the minimal training which beginning teachers received in the New Education, see Neil Sutherland, “The Triumph of ‘Formalism’: Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s,” in *BC Studies*, special issue on Vancouver 1886-1986, nos. 69/70 (Spring/Summer 1986), 175-210.

³⁴ *AR*, 1923, F29. For other inspectors’ reports of rigid teaching practices in remote schools, see *AR*, 1920, C30; 1921, F28; and 1923, F28, F30.

The credulous worshipper of false educational gods, he becomes a wanderer in the dark, the unsuspecting victim of pedagogical charlatanism and foppery.³⁵

Along with suspect pedagogy, the problem of teacher transiency also had deleterious effects on school efficiency. According to the *Survey* the most frequent changes of teachers were in the rural and assisted schools.³⁶ The situation was graphically described by Inspector H. H. Mackenzie with a colourful Gaelic reference bespeaking his ethnic background:

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 sighing of the wind in the pines, the murmuring of the mountain streams seem to unite in the ancient lament, "Ch till shinne tuille" — "we return no more."³⁷

The inspectors frequently lamented the unfortunate 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."³⁸ Inspector G. H. Gower of Prince George reported in 1922 that "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."³⁹ Arthur Anstey of the New Westminster district pointed to another common failing resulting from teacher transiency:

In nearly all these [smaller] 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.⁴⁰

The *Survey* and *AR* attributed the phenomenon of teacher transiency to the rural teacher's below-average salary. There was virtual unanimity

³⁵ *Survey*, 134.

³⁶ *Survey*, 188.

³⁷ *AR*, 1920, C26.

³⁸ *AR*, 1922, C33.

³⁹ *AR*, 1922, C40.

⁴⁰ *AR*, 1922, C31. For other reports on teacher transiency, see *AR*, 1922, C25, C27, C33, C37; 1923, F29; 1924, T53, T58; and 1925, M39.

among inspectors in favour of increasing the salary of rural and assisted teachers.⁴¹ An exception was A. R. Lord, who noted in 1921 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."⁴² Actually Lord's figure was too high; nor did he mention the fact that the assisted school teacher was still paid on the average \$300 less than her urban counterpart, not to mention her urban male counterpart.⁴³ In 1923, 496 out of 689 teachers (or 70.5 percent) reported in the *TBR* that they were making under \$1,100 per annum. Most of the remainder made under \$1,250. In 1928, 545 out of 739 teachers (or 73.7 percent) reported salaries under \$1,100 per annum. Most of the others by then made under \$1,200, indicating some slippage in salary payments.

Despite the salary issue, most inspectors directed their energies towards recommending improvement in rural teachers' education. They believed that teacher transiency as well as the prevalence of traditional pedagogical styles were directly related to a lack of professional training. Inspector G. H. Gower of the Prince George District 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.⁴⁴

The inspectors' concern was only marginally 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 a teaching degree from a university, and 23 percent versus 33 percent had a first-class teaching certificate. The matter of experience was a more telling statistic: the rural and assisted school teacher was much less experienced. The total 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. In addition, 48 percent of the

⁴¹ For example, see *AR*, 1920, C27, C30, C37; 1921, F21, F24; and 1922, C31. See also the *Survey* for similar recommendations, 190-92.

⁴² *AR*, 1921, F36.

⁴³ See the *AR* statistical tables.

⁴⁴ *AR*, 1921, F39. For other reports that complained of teacher inability, see especially *AR*, 1922, C27; and 1923, F29, F39.

rural and assisted school teachers had less than three years' teaching experience compared to 16 percent of urban teachers.⁴⁵

The reformers strove to remedy the lack of education and experience through the creation of "rural-minded" teachers.⁴⁶ The *Survey* recommended that the normal school instructors should improve their own professional training as well as rectify the oppressive relationship between the domineering older male instructor and the younger female student teacher. Instructors were overwhelmingly male and over forty-five; student teachers predominantly female and under twenty. Also, rural-oriented subjects could be included in the curriculum, particularly training in rural sociology and administration, educational theory, philosophy, psychology, and history, in addition to tests and measurements. These courses would increase the teacher's understanding of her duties and situation in the rural school.⁴⁷

The *Survey* strongly suggested the implementation of practice teaching in isolated schools. Teacher discontent and subsequent migration would no longer be problems if the properly trained teacher knew exactly what to expect in a rural school. Thus the *Survey* called for the development of a system of reports of each remote community in relation to educational, social, economic, and geographical conditions, and especially teacher accommodation. These reports would be distributed to potential candidates for rural school teaching, and in this way would temper teacher expectations of comfortable conditions in such employment. The wildest hope of the administrators was for the training of a legion of the "strongest" teachers,⁴⁸ rural-minded and well-versed in progressive technique and philosophy, intent on delivering the highest standards of education possible to isolated children. The *Survey* seemed to have prudently taken to heart the theme encapsulated in Norman Fergus Black's comparison in an article on rural schools 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."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Survey*, 18, 186-88. A teaching degree from a university was a three-year programme, while a first-class certificate required only one year of post-secondary study. A second-class certificate required one year of normal school and three years of high school, while a third-class certificate, abolished in 1922, demanded only one term (four months at normal school) and three years of high school.

⁴⁶ See Jones, "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers," *passim*.

⁴⁷ *Survey*, 202, 194, 207-14; and of the inspectors' reports, see especially *AR*, 1921, F63; 1922, C28; and 1924, T42.

⁴⁸ *Survey*, 194-95.

⁴⁹ Norman Fergus Black, "Rural School Problems," *B.C. Teacher* (June 1924): 226-27.

A better-trained teacher was considered a panacea to the rural school problem. This was only part of the solution, however, as the reformers failed to take into account both market forces and the teacher's demographics. To a great extent, market forces determined teacher turnover in the school as teachers tended to migrate from the remote areas if jobs were available in the town or city. In general, the rural school was considered by the young and inexperienced teacher as a training ground,⁵⁰ by the older and more experienced teacher merely as a temporary setback, by the "birds of passage" as a "stepping stone" to another profession,⁵¹ and by others as a place to get away from to improve their lives and career chances elsewhere. Most were what might be called urban animals, if not by birth and upbringing then by aspiration, given their time in normal school and exposure to urban amenities.

The teacher's demographic profile might or might not be explanatory of teacher discontent and transiency. Whatever the case, the rural teacher was most likely to be young, female, and unmarried. In 1925, out of 903 rural and assisted school teachers, 79 percent were female, 91 percent were unmarried, and their average age was 23.6 years. By 1930 the proportion of women teachers rose to 83.5 percent and those who were single climbed to 92.5 percent.⁵² The combination of youth and gender drew the attention of many inspectors and eventually led to the appointment in 1928 of a Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, whose sole responsibility was to minister to female teachers in difficult, out-of-the-way postings. The notion that the rural areas were too rugged and wild for the delicate sensibilities of the young female permeated teacher correspondence with the educational authorities in Victoria. Overall there was a sense, as the sociologist Mary O'Brien has noted in another connection, that "a young woman living alone, protected by neither father nor husband but only by her rather feeble morality, was worrisome."⁵³ It has been said that the rural teacher was mindful of three things: her clothing, her money, and her reputation. The anxiety about "children" away from home, especially "girls," has been pointed up by the historian John Calam. In recounting the pre-World War I campaign for establishing a normal school in Victoria, Calam underlined the public concern among Victoria's citizenry about having to send aspiring teachers from Vancouver Island to Vancouver for their train-

⁵⁰ *AR*, 1923, F31.

⁵¹ *Survey*, 189.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 177-79 and *AR* statistical tables.

⁵³ Mary O'Brien, "Sexism in Education," in Ratna Ghosh and Douglas Ray, eds., *Social Change and Education in Canada* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 263.

ing. "Children" would be "separated from home influence at a most critical time in their lives," warned the *Victoria Times*, and girls, if not boys, made vulnerable to certain dangers "out among strangers." The reference to "girls" and "boys" and anxiety over "children" away from home goes to the root of the problem of rural school teachers in remote environs since these same "boys" and "girls" within a year found themselves in a world of men and women, often far from home.⁵⁴

Many rural school locations became commonly designated by inspectors and others as "a man's school." In the 1923 *TBR*, Mrs. K. E. Easton of the Fort St. John school warned that this was a "pioneer settlement," and she "would not advice [*sic*] a lady especially a young one to come here. . . . Zero ladies here. Transportation poor — Mail every two (2) weeks." 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 [*sic*] for teacher. It is only suitable for a male who likes catering for himself. Rowing and fishing can be had as a pastime.

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 obtain during winter. Snow and ice good substitutes." In July 1923, Harold Des Reaney complained about the scarcity of 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. In the far north at Telegraph Creek near the Yukon border, with an average winter white population of twelve, Clare Tervo found life "rather lonely socially." Despite the "beautiful scenery" and "healthful climate" this "typical frontier town" to her mind deserved "a man's school." Similarly Pender Harbour on the Sechelt Peninsula was said to be "only suitable for a male who likes catering for himself." The teacher, then a female, had "no woman neighbours, practically no social life at present." Some communities were far more isolated than Pender Harbour. Dog Creek, sixty miles south of Williams Lake in Cariboo ranching country, was so inaccessible that Pansy Price was not able to get out at Christmas or Easter for holidays. "The trip is too cold and too long at these times. . . . 10 months is the full term here." Similarly

⁵⁴ Calam, "Teaching the Teachers," 37.

at Kingcome Inlet, 250 miles north of Vancouver, a teacher would have to put in the whole year.⁵⁵

Schools located near mines, logging camps, and railway construction sites were equally "dangerous" for young female teachers. The male teacher at Stevenson Creek south of Princeton warned: "This would be a dangerous district to send a young girl to as there are many lone prospectors passing to and fro."⁵⁶ Lexie McLeod, who taught in Lower Nicola in 1921, remembered that the only single non-Indian 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.⁵⁷ Mildred McQuillan, who taught in Fort Fraser west of Vanderhoof 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.⁵⁸ Miss Edna May Hicks, who taught in Olsen Valley near Powell River in 1926, remembered well "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. . . ."⁵⁹ On Mayne Island Irene Hawes, only eighteen and fresh out of normal school, found the advances of a seventeen-year-old male Grade 7 student more than disconcerting. A later report recounts how the chap

took one look at the attractive young schoolmarm and decided to lay siege to her, since she was the finest looking maiden he had ever seen. At recess he proceeded to make his intentions known, and the little lady had to beat a strategic retreat.⁶⁰

Although documentary evidence of amorous adventures is slim, the fact

⁵⁵ *TBR*, Frances A. Padgett, Wilmer, 1928; Clare Tervo, Telegraph Creek, 1928; Janet A. Mill, Pender Harbour, 1923; Winnifred Green, Pender Harbour, 1928; Pansy K. Price, Dog Creek, 1928; Bess Roney, Kingcome Inlet, 1923.

⁵⁶ *TBR*, F. Julian Willway, Stevenson Creek, 1928.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mrs. Lexie Lawrie (née McLeod), retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 24 Feb. 1986.

⁵⁸ Mildred E. McQuillan, Letters, 1927, PABC. McQuillan's diary is instructive because it contains her attitudes towards her work and community, and gives an insight into the trials of a young remote schoolteacher. Her experiences encapsulate those undergone by countless other teachers in the 1920s.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. Edna May Embury (née Hicks), 1986. Mrs. Embury was referring to the famous Chisholm murder near Prince Rupert which occurred in May 1926. The murderer was never apprehended nor the motive officially established.

⁶⁰ Jesse Brown, ed., *Mayne Island Fall Fair* (Mayne Island: Mayne Island Agricultural Society and Fall Fair, 1971), 35-36.

that the teacher was usually young and unmarried presented certain problems of adjustment. First, she 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 who disapproved of the relationship, and, in the extreme, physical harm. The teacher therefore had to gauge her acquaintances and community politics precisely. In the *TBR*, several references were made to the teachers' general feelings of isolation and loneliness.⁶¹ An empty social and love life not from choice must frequently have embittered her. Often in the remote communities, the number of eligible males was so small that the teacher became particularly eager to leave the area for one with a larger marriage market. For example, Lexie McLeod left Lower Nicola to "grab a husband" in Vancouver, while Mildred McQuillan married shortly after leaving Fort Fraser in December 1927.⁶² Margaret Lanyon, who taught in Black Canyon near Ashcroft from 1926 to 1928, felt "stuck" in the community and eventually left for a less isolated school at Dewdney even though she took a pay cut.⁶³ The other half of the equation, however, should not be overlooked: the occasional female teacher stayed on in the community, met and married a local man, and often settled down there. Of course some teachers remained single all their lives, thriving on the independence their isolation accorded them.

Living arrangements were very important for rural teachers since where and how they lived intimately affected both their work and their private lives. Problems with boarding arrangements and the lack of facilities for "baching" were often very stressful for the unmarried teacher and were a perennial problem for most teachers. "Baching" held numerous difficulties especially for young, green female teachers living away from home for the first time. At Shuttly Bench, a farming community on Kootenay Lake, Kathleen Murphy rode horseback to school four miles each day from the village of Kaslo, where she had a home of her own. By contrast, on the province's west coast near Bella Bella, Annie Haughton rowed every morn-

⁶¹ See especially *TBR*, 1923, 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 [her] 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."

⁶² Lawrie, interview, 1986; "McQuillan: Backwoods Teacher," *Victoria Times-Colonist*, 31 Aug. 1981, 35.

⁶³ Interview with Mrs. Margaret Manning (née Lanyon), retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, 12 April 1987.

ing to her school on Hunter Island, an Icelandic settlement. On Thetis Island, one of the Gulf Islands, "nobody will board the teacher. I have just been turned out of my shack and have got another till the end of June." Five years later in 1928 the new teacher complained: "One must 'batch'. Nearest home to school 1½ miles. Can rent for winter but not during summer months. Very hard to find a house at any time." At Soda Creek north of Williams Lake, C. Bertrand lamented, "I am at present living in the government jail with borrowed furniture."⁶⁴ At least this jail was a solid structure.

The alternative of boarding presented no end of worries, especially for the new teacher who often found herself greeted at the train station or steamship dock by at least two trustees each of whom wanted to board her. Her cash income, translated into boarding costs, was the prize. Typical of the competition was the story told of the Cawston teacher (south Okanagan) who was expected to arrive by the Great Northern Railway from Princeton. Arrangements had been made for her to board at a certain home, but the other family that wanted her journeyed to Hedley by car, took her off the train, and drove her to their home where she stayed.⁶⁵ At Stuart River, thirty miles from Vanderhoof,

there is a great deal of jealousy and quarreling over where the teacher boards. This spirit is carried on 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 be in.⁶⁶

In the 1920s boarding costs averaged about \$35 per month or about one-third of the teacher's monthly salary. In the 1923 *TBR*, four out of five teachers (446 out of 574 reporting) estimated boarding costs in the range of \$30 to \$40 per month in their community. In 1928, 520 out of 624 (or 83.2 percent) reported boarding costs in the same range.

Just as the teacher's living conditions were often problematic, so was the school building itself. Since the building was a parental responsibility, its condition tended to reflect the economic situation of the locality. The cost for the construction of assisted schools was underwritten by the government once the building was erected. Thus the state of the school often reflected the level of community prosperity. The Putman-Weir *Survey*

⁶⁴ *TBR*, Kathleen Murphy, Shutty Bench, 1928; Annie Haughton, Hunter Island, 1923; A. G. W. Dodds, Thetis Island, 1923; Odo A. Barry, Thetis Island, 1928; C. Bertrand, Soda Creek, 1923.

⁶⁵ Kathleen S. Dewdney, "Christopher Tickell," *Okanagan Historical Society Report* 39 (1976): 84.

⁶⁶ *TBR*, J. Harry Downard, Stuart River, 1928.

pointed to the wide discrepancies in the socio-economic conditions in remote areas of the province by arguing that “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.”⁶⁷ 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 rural schools were modern, built with lumber, but frequently even these were too small to house the pupils adequately. Running water, electricity, and toilets were rarely seen in the school. The *Survey* 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.⁶⁸

The inspectors’ reports assessed the general condition of some schools, from the extreme of “dangerous and unsanitary firetraps” to the severe lack of equipment and supplies.⁶⁹ Indeed, the most common complaints in the *TBR* dealt with the school size, lack of lighting, ventilation, conveniences, and supplies,⁷⁰ but education officials were hard-pressed to find a remedy for the situation. The *Survey* reluctantly conceded that

many handicaps, both economic and social, incident to rural life, will necessarily be experienced in the remote areas . . . for a considerable number of years. The conditions of pioneer life in many of these areas are still in existence and cannot be entirely overcome by any government.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Survey*, 178.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁹ *AR*, 1921, F23; 1920, C26, C30; 1924, T55, T59; and 1925, M27.

⁷⁰ See especially *TBR*, 1923; Miss Ferguson in Cache Creek; Miss Belle McGauley in Champion Creek; Miss Frances H. Hampson in Cultus Lake; Miss Beatrice Tracey in Johnson’s Landing; and Miss Ida M. Burnstill in Norwegian Creek. Also see McQuillan Letters, PABC, and Gerry Andrews, *Metis Outpost: Memoirs of the First Schoolmaster at the Metis Settlement of Kelly Lake, B.C., 1923-1925* (Victoria: Pencrest Publishers, 1985), 24.

⁷¹ *Survey*, 178.

By contrast, the reforming spirit and optimistic outlook of most inspectors led them to quite optimistic conclusions. 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."⁷² But how could the teachers influence school efficiency if the community was insolvent? 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 often were parsimonious and uncooperative. F. W. Hobson, who taught in Beaver Cove near Alert Bay, reported that "this school district has no regular method of financing for school purposes, the amount collected occasionally being grudgingly paid by the residents. . . . The inhabitants in general are narrow minded."⁷³ The *Survey* noted that in some areas control over education was placed in the hands of local dictators (the three elected school trustees) who harboured "petty . . . jealousies toward each other," and as a result they pushed local control to an "illogical extreme."⁷⁴ Volatile local politics kept funds from being invested wisely. Interfamily disputes were rife, and the teacher had to be careful to remain neutral. In Pineview, eight miles from Prince George, R. R. Gordon-Cumming wrote confidentially 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.⁷⁵

Marion Sleighton, in Mud River near 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 near Prince George, and Sadie Johnston, who taught in West Demars south of Nakusp in 1928, recalled:

⁷² *AR*, 1920, C27. See also *AR*, 1921, F22, F32, F34; and 1922, C33.

⁷³ *TBR*, 1923; North Dawson Creek, Beaver Cove.

⁷⁴ *Survey*, 18. The *Survey* commented on the disproportionate amount of control the 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. See pp. 18-19, 124-27, and 272-79.

⁷⁵ *TBR*, Pineview, 1923. For more on the experiences of Gordon-Cumming, see Jones, "Creating Rural-Minded Teachers," 170-71.

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 over 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.⁷⁶

The uncooperative manner of the local people was often directly responsible for 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 has 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."⁷⁷ While for the most part the *AR* neglected the social aspects of the community, the *Survey* took care to mention the prevalence of alcoholism in some communities as a contributing factor to school inefficiency. It, however, saw this only in terms of money spent on alcohol vis-à-vis the school instead of in respect to its harmful effects on pupils' upbringing, teacher's security, and community life generally.⁷⁸

Also overlooked were the implications of the community's ethnic composition. The teacher was sometimes forced to deal with the idiosyncracies of different languages and customs among both students and their parents. She was not only in a remote culture, but sometimes in an alien one as well. Where the inhabitants were from northern and western Europe, the teachers, like B.C. society in general, were usually favourable in their comments. Despite the long-standing antipathy of British Columbians to Japanese Canadians, teachers reporting in the *TBR* held their Japanese-Canadian students in high regard. Teachers in Doukhobor communities, however, such as Brilliant, Castlegar, North Kettle River, and Pass Creek, were virtually unanimous in describing their charges and their parents as "difficult." Irregular and non-attendance was a perennial problem. Most Native children were by this time attending federally sponsored schools and thus

⁷⁶ Letter from Mrs. Sadie J. Stromgren (née Johnston), retired schoolteacher, New Westminster, B.C., April 1986.

⁷⁷ *TBR*, Cape Scott, 1923; Okanagan Landing, 1923. For complaints about the obstinacy of the local people, see also *TBR*, 1923; 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.

⁷⁸ *Survey*, 125-27.

were rarely found in public schools, although Métis and mixed blood children were. Teacher opinion approximated the prejudices found in society generally.⁷⁹

By the 1920s the in-school workday consisted of much more than simply teaching. Teachers were expected to take responsibility for the behaviour of their students during lunch hours and school breaks such as recess. They were supposed to “improve” and beautify their school grounds, a daunting task in many communities where forest or sea lay close at hand. Modern health methods demanded that all teachers, rural and urban, inspect pupils for contagious diseases. Maintaining the compulsory school records consumed hours of busy work. Lighting fires, scrubbing the floor and blackboards (and sometimes painting walls too), and general custodial duties were in many school districts the teacher’s responsibility. Sometimes, with or without the school board’s assistance, she would enlist the labour of one or more older students to carry out these onerous duties. Less often groups of parents helped out. But all too frequently the teacher’s answer in the *TBR* as to whether or not the school employed a janitor was a blunt “no.”

The figures from the *TBR* are very revealing on this account. Of 658 responses in the 1923 questionnaire to the query “Does Board engage a janitor for school?” 352 teachers responded “yes” and 196 answered “no.” The remaining 110 indicated a variety of alternatives including part-time janitors (only on weekends, once a month, or light fires only, to clean only), students, parents, or teachers as janitors, or both students and teachers as janitors. In other words, in 306 out of 658 schools (fully 46.5 percent) the teacher was either completely or partly responsible for janitorial duties herself or else had to supervise the work of someone else. The situation was marginally better in 1928. Then, of 722 responses to this question, the answer was “yes” in 435 cases, “no” in 160. The remaining 127 schools had a variety of makeshift arrangements over which the teacher retained supervisory capacity. In a total of 287 schools (or 39.6 percent), therefore, the teacher was either fully or partially responsible for janitorial duties. It was circumstances such as these that made the rural teacher feel much more akin in reality to a worker than a professional.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ For details on ethnicity as a factor in teachers’ lives, see my “The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers’ Views on Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920’s,” in Patricia E. Roy, ed., *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).

⁸⁰ Michael Apple contends that teachers in the twentieth century are members of both the petite bourgeoisie and the working class. Apple, “Work, Class and Teaching,” in Stephen Walker and Len Barton, eds., *Gender, Class and Education* (New York, 1983), 53-67. For Ontario and Quebec, see Prentice and Danylewycz, “Teachers’ Work,” 59-80.

Finally, the temporary nature of some communities hindered school reform and contributed to teacher transiency. Many schools were located in areas where economic activity was seasonal, where extractive resource industries kept the community alive only until the minerals or timber were exhausted, or where railroad construction led to tie-making until the local stretch of line was completed. As a result of such activity, the teacher was never assured of the school's reopening the following school year because the families, fearing unemployment, would migrate out of the area to make a living elsewhere. The *Survey* speculated that only one in three settlers in any given remote community was a permanent resident,⁸¹ and in the *AR* the inspectors alluded to the periodic 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 teaching a "procession of pupils."⁸² For the teachers, therefore, any long-range plans for the school in the way of physical improvements, even if the money were available, or the development of a structured pedagogical framework based on projected attendance figures were out of the question.

Parental decisions to withdraw their children from school were not always a measure of disinterest in or indifference to education as often interpreted by school inspectors. Economic factors, such as work or child-caring at home, were considered by parents as legitimate reasons for non-attendance at school. For example, the teacher at Telkwa in the Bulkley Valley reported in 1928: "Majority of farmers badly off — hence poor salaries — attendance is poor as farmers kept out boys to help on farms — unable to engage help."⁸³ When disputes arose between parents and teachers over the quality and type of education being provided, parents actually withdrew their children from school as a form of protest. Inspector A. E. Miller of the Kootenay District somewhat earlier in 1912 interpreted these incidents as examples of negative parental attitudes towards formal schooling. "Until the people living in such districts fully realize the importance of working with, and not against, the teacher, the conditions of their schools must continue to be extremely unsatisfactory."⁸⁴ He went on to chastise such parents for contributing to the problem of poor attendance by their alleged "lack of interest" in public education. From another perspective, however, it might well be argued that these disputes by their very nature demonstrated not lack of interest but rather parental concern about who

⁸¹ *Survey*, 124.

⁸² *AR*, 1922, C23.

⁸³ *TBR*, Alfred J. Clotworthy, Telkwa, 1928.

⁸⁴ *AR*, 1912, 41.

was teaching and what was being taught. To the disgruntled parents the disputes were hardly "petty," the common inspectorial designation.⁸⁵

IV

One major outcome of the Putman-Weir Report with its continual reference to the rural school problem in B.C. was to focus attention as never before on the problems of the non-urban school. Typical of other New Education spokesmen, Putman and Weir maintained there was a positive correlation between the amount of money spent on schools and the quality of education. Significantly, they were also disturbed by the apparent disparities between rural and urban schooling. If some semblance of equality of opportunity, a New Education goal, were to be attained, more time and money would have to be expended on addressing the rural school problem.

In the wake of the Putman-Weir *Survey* the rural school seemed, to the inspectors at any rate, to be showing signs of improvement. The teachers between 1925 and 1930 appeared to be better qualified and happier as they stayed longer in each school. A "steadily improving" attitude of the teachers who were "deeply interested" in their work and "eager to improve their methods and technique" spread throughout the countryside.⁸⁶ Greater efficiency and academic progress by the students were recorded, attributable by some inspectors to decreased teacher transiency.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸

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

⁸⁵ For a similar analysis and a description of the importance of the "inspective function," that is, the administrative role of school inspectors, see Philip Corrigan and Bruce Curtis, "Education, Inspection and State Formation: A Preliminary Statement," *Historical Papers, 1985* (C.H.A., Montreal), 156-71.

⁸⁶ See especially *AR*, 1926, R37; 1928, V31; and 1929, R11, 30, 33.

⁸⁷ See especially *AR*, 1926, R32, 36, 38, 40; 1927, M41; 1928, V27; and 1929, R28.

⁸⁸ *AR*, 1926, R41.

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.⁸⁹

In 1928 H. H. Mackenzie asserted:

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 elementary, secondary, professional, and higher institutions of learning.⁹⁰

Even 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.⁹¹ 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 of 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.⁹²

Inspector A. F. Matthews asserted:

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.⁹³

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.⁹⁴

The inspectors believed that rural-minded teachers were finally being

⁸⁹ *AR*, 1928, V26.

⁹⁰ *AR*, 1928, V24.

⁹¹ *AR*, 1919, R11.

⁹² *AR*, 1927, M39.

⁹³ *AR*, 1928, V27. The reports which linked increased teacher qualifications to summer school training are numerous. See especially *AR*, 1926, R32, 36; 1927, M14; 1928, V25, 30, 31; and 1929, R31.

⁹⁴ See especially *AR*, 1927, M32, 37; and 1928, V22.

created. The Normal Schools appeared to be training teachers successfully in the art of remote school 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 *Survey's* recommendations for Normal School reform of rural school teacher training were either sluggishly applied or ignored. Of a total of 23 courses included in the Victoria Normal School curriculum in 1927, only one, nature study, dealt with a rural subject.⁹⁵ The much-touted rural sociology was not even offered. For the teachers enrolled in Vancouver Normal School, practice teaching in a one-room school was restricted to one week if it existed at all. Even then, practice teaching schools were located in such communities as Burnaby, Richmond, North Vancouver, Delta, and Surrey, which, though sometimes "rural" in their surroundings, were hardly isolated enough for the teacher to experience the conditions of rural teaching. Practice teaching at the Victoria Normal School was similarly conducted within easy reach of Victoria. Even a brief session in a coastal school (for which student teachers' attendance figures are unavailable) would not have exposed the teacher to the pedagogical problems associated with rural community impoverishment, settler 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 practice teaching programme, in particular the lack of adequate facilities.⁹⁶ Each school set up a rural "demonstration" school within its main building, but the setting was inherently artificial. To illustrate, a teacher recalls that at the Victoria Normal School she "learned to correlate, that is, overlap timetables," a procedure that stood the beginning rural teacher in good stead.⁹⁷ But this was a far cry from practice in the isolation of a Quick, Rolla, Horsefly, Usk, Big Creek, Chu Chua, or Yahk.

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, mainly because of its pro-

⁹⁵ See *AR*, 1927, M50, and 1929, R43. In 1928, twenty-four courses were offered; in 1929, twenty-six courses. See *AR*, 1928, V47, and 1929, R43. The curriculum for the Vancouver Normal School is unavailable for these years.

⁹⁶ See especially *AR*, 1926, R51-52; 1927, M50-52; and 1929, R43. It is interesting to note that while principal of the Saskatoon Normal School, Weir had advocated the placement of practice teachers in conditions "that obtain in rural communities" rather than in urban schools. Saskatchewan, *AR*, 1919, 101; 1920, 62.

⁹⁷ Sylvia McKay (1929, Victoria Normal School), Normal School Project, University of Victoria, interviewer Judy Windle, tape recording 78-Y-27. Citation kindly provided by John Calam.

hibitive tuition fees and inaccessible location for most of them. At most, 15 percent of all rural and assisted school teachers attended between 1925 and 1930 — as low as 9 percent in 1927 with a marked decrease in 1930.⁹⁸ Of the total 1,939 teachers who went to 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 only fifty-nine. In 1926, only six students sat in on rural science before the course was cancelled the following year; in 1927, six teachers studied social science, which incorporated rural sociology (the course was dropped in 1928); and a high of twenty-two teachers attended nature study class in 1927, a course no longer offered by 1930.⁹⁹ Essentially, in the five years a total of only five rural courses were offered in Summer School, while in any one year at least fourteen other subjects were available in the curriculum.¹⁰⁰ Thus, not only were the vast majority of remote school teachers not attending Summer School, but the few who did shunned the very courses which may have helped them better cope with rural contingencies. Most were probably looking for a first-class certificate and a job in the city.

As with Normal School reform, other recommendations of the *Survey* were largely neglected. The salary structure for the rural school teacher remained the same — they were still underpaid vis-à-vis their urban counterparts — and the supervision of the teachers did not improve. The gulf between town and country schools was reflected in the hierarchy among teachers, with urban teachers accorded a higher place. The inspectors were hampered constantly by inclement weather and poor transportation networks,¹⁰¹ and their brief visits to each school were occupied with administering standardized intelligence and achievement tests, one of the few recommendations of the *Survey* that was implemented. Margaret Lanyon remembered how little the inspectors cared about her welfare,¹⁰² and Miss M. J. Lynes, in Crawford Creek, responded to the inquiry for information

⁹⁸ Indeed, a high of only 15 percent of all the teachers in the province attended during these years.

⁹⁹ The average attendance of rural and assisted schoolteachers for each year between 1925-1930 was 112 as opposed to 388 average total enrolment per year. It is important to note that the one-room teacher enrolment in summer school and attendance in the various rural courses were perforce smaller than the figures given for rural and assisted schoolteachers.

¹⁰⁰ All statistics were drawn from the *AR*.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, *AR*, 1928, V28; and *AR*, 1927, M31, where the time consumed waiting for the boats "as the only means of conveyance in certain of [my] districts . . . [was] altogether out of proportion to the number of schools to be visited." For a fascinating study of transportation networks of the time, see Cole Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains, 1870-1930," *BC Studies* 58 (Summer 1983): 3-39.

¹⁰² Interview, Mrs. Manning, 1987.

from the Teachers' Bureau with a resentful "This is the *first* [official] request I have received."¹⁰³ She may well have been bitter because of the oft-reported aloof attitude many inspectors displayed towards the young schoolteacher and the minimal contact she had with her inspector.¹⁰⁴

An indication to the inspectors that the teachers were trying to upgrade their knowledge and expertise was the 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."¹⁰⁵ A safe inference can be made, however, that few remote teachers attended these conventions. They were held in some districts only, and would have been inaccessible to many remote teachers who, because of their isolation, found that even collecting the weekly mail from a town a few miles away was a harrowing and laborious chore.¹⁰⁶

Although the inspectors were wrong about Normal School efficacy in creating rural-minded teachers and signs of increased teacher conscientiousness, they were accurate in reporting an improvement in teachers' qualifications.¹⁰⁷ Progressively more rural and assisted school teachers had first-class certificates in 1930 than in 1925 (over a third as opposed to under a quarter).¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, however, fewer rural and assisted school teachers were attending university for an academic certificate, as the 5 percent who were working towards a bachelor's degree in 1925 dropped to 3.5 percent in 1930.¹⁰⁹

The inspectors attributed this improvement in qualifications to Normal School effectiveness when in fact formal instruction had little to do with the increase in more educated graduates. Inspector Leslie J. Bruce was one

¹⁰³ *TBR*, Crawford Creek, 1928.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Mrs. M. Embury, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 10 March 1986; interview, Mrs. Lexie Lawrie, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 24 Feb. 1986; interview, Mrs. Manning, 1987; interview, Miss Mary Pack, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 25 March 1986; and interview, Mrs. G. A. Steele (née Smith), retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, B.C., 11 April 1987.

¹⁰⁵ *AR*, 1927, M37.

¹⁰⁶ 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 remote school.

¹⁰⁷ See especially *AR*, 1926, R35; 1928, V21, 31; and 1929, R11.

¹⁰⁸ Of all rural and assisted teachers in 1930, 34.5 percent had first-class certificates versus 23 percent in 1925; 58.5 percent in 1930 had second-class certificates versus 64 percent in 1925; 2.1 percent had third-class certificates in 1930 versus 7 percent in 1925. The issuance of third-class certificates had been stopped in 1922.

¹⁰⁹ Changes in percentages for rural and assisted schoolteachers coincided roughly with the figures for other teacher classifications. All statistics were drawn from the *AR* tables.

of the few officials to recognize a larger force at work — the labour market. “So many teachers are available,” he wrote in 1927, “that School Boards now have the opportunity to obtain teachers who are likely to do at least fair work.” A. F. Matthews of the Kamloops inspectorate noted that the “supply of teachers in this Province is now [1928] somewhat greater than is the demand for their services.” J. D. MacLean, the Minister of Education in 1925, acknowledged the importance of market forces, especially their effect on teacher transiency.¹¹⁰ In 1924 the *AR* noted an actual surplus of teachers.¹¹¹ The following year the *Province* observed that 500 teachers were out of work and the Normal Schools were turning out teachers too quickly.¹¹² Further evidence that the teachers’ job market was constricting lay in Normal School enrolment. Between 1924 and 1926, attendance in both Normal Schools dropped from 661 to 335, and fluctuated between 339 and 375 up to 1930.¹¹³ This widening discrepancy between teacher supply and demand made teaching jobs more competitive; better qualifications were needed if the teacher hoped to secure employment. Once employed, she would be reluctant to relinquish her post considering the lack of alternative positions available.¹¹⁴ The increase in teacher enthusiasm may have been somewhat superficial, therefore, because an indication of indifference on the part of the teacher could contribute to a negative inspector’s report, subsequent dismissal, and possible unemployment. In essence, then, the Normal Schools were not responsible for producing more qualified graduates; rather the students were compelled to earn a higher certificate if they wanted a job.

V

By 1930 rural school teaching conditions were probably no better than they had been at the start of the decade, perhaps even worse. Some speculation about the possible reasons why officials thought they were improving

¹¹⁰ *AR*, 1927, M34; 1928, V26; 1925, M11.

¹¹¹ *AR*, 1924, T56.

¹¹² *Department of Education Newspaper Clippings*, Provincial Archives, Victoria, B.C., 1925.

¹¹³ The statistics were drawn from the *AR*.

¹¹⁴ Just how important teaching qualifications were in helping to secure a teaching job was dependent mostly upon community requirements as perceived by the local school board. Interestingly, in 1926 Miss Margaret Lanyon landed her job in Black Canyon 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 was 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.)

may be instructive. First, the administrators were getting the wrong impression of rural conditions. The *TBR* were distributed by a branch of the Department of Education, the Teachers' Bureau, primarily to assist local school boards in securing appropriate teachers and assisting unemployed teachers in obtaining positions. The education 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 annually, largely for the purpose of administering the Department's new intelligence and achievement tests. They would not have had the time to explore local problems.

Second, 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 or closer to Vancouver or Victoria. Moreover, at this time of scrutiny and public criticism prompted by the *Survey*, the inspectors lauded the efforts of the Normal Schools to produce better graduates, a favourable impression which must have sat well with friends and colleagues in Victoria and Vancouver.

Third, policies affecting rural school reform that were proposed in the 1920s were not actually put into practice to any degree at that time. Chief among the new policy initiatives was school consolidation, which was also advocated in the Putman-Weir Report. The heralded closure of one-room schools and their replacement by multi-room consolidated schools required, however, the better part of the next half-century to accomplish. Significantly, there was no mention of school consolidation in the *TBR*. Likewise, the amalgamation of school districts as a move to provide a more efficient rural school administration and to overcome the sort of teacher complaints detailed above took another two or three decades before culminating in the seventy-five districts that now exist in B.C. The major step was taken in 1945 as a result of the Cameron Report of that year, which led to the amalgamation of most of the 650 school boards in the province. Both these measures encountered considerable resistance from local communities, which accounts in part for the delay in their implementation.¹¹⁵ As the lines of authority became more formal and increasingly standardized, the locus of power and decision-making shifted from the local school

¹¹⁵ David C. Jones, "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chilliwack, B.C., 1919-1920," in Jones, Sheehan, and Stamp, eds., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West*, chap. 9.

boards and parents to the central authority in Victoria. Supporters of the community-controlled school system struggled stubbornly against the forces of change and modernization represented by such progressive documents as the Putman-Weir Report.

Fourth, the administrators, and later historians, may have been blinded by progress in other areas of the educational system. During the late 1920s both school facilities and educational opportunity were expanding. New urban schools were being built, student population was increasing, and attendance levels were rising. High schools and superior schools in the larger rural areas were being established, and a proportionate increase in school costs was occurring. The bureaucracy expanded as problems of growth were tackled, and so unarticulated conditions of stagnation or decay were easily ignored. If one took account only of urban schools (both city and town), very real progress was in fact taking place.

Paradoxically, even while remote school teaching remained as difficult or became even more strenuous throughout the 1920s, the administrators seemed to grow less concerned. An overview of the entire decade reveals that they had little idea of the hardship and frustration experienced by hundreds of isolated teachers. More generally, by 1930 government officials were not nearly as worried about rural depopulation and the drift to the cities as they had been in 1910. By the late twenties the rural myth had almost dissipated in the province, and the pre-eminent rural reform advocate, J. W. Gibson, had been eased out of his position as Director of Elementary Agricultural Instruction.¹¹⁶ Despite the appointment of Lottie Bowron as Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer late in 1928, the rural teacher was even more without official solace and comfort at the end of the decade than earlier. The earlier argument from Gibson and others that the rural teacher at least had the advantage of better "moral conditions" by being in the countryside was by now no longer voiced. One can readily see from the circumstances described above how attempts at community leadership were most often futile.

In many ways the rural school problem in British Columbia was more intractable than on the Prairies. The latter certainly had its distances and isolation, but nothing to match this province's isolated mountain valleys.¹¹⁷ Many of these almost inaccessible locations were difficult to service then and some are not much better today. The difficult terrain presented the

¹¹⁶ David C. Jones, "The *Zeitgeist* of Western Settlement: Education and the Myth of the Land," in Wilson and Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia*, chap. 3.

¹¹⁷ Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life Around Idaho Peak," *Canadian Historical Review* LXVI, no. 3 (September 1985): 315-43.

authorities with a set of problems, much attested to in the journals of Lottie Bowron,¹¹⁸ quite different from those which were found on the Prairies and in Northern Ontario. Certainly, well into the 1930s within these small pockets of habitation throughout British Columbia, schools remained inefficient and teachers continued to struggle. In all of this, however, Miss Mary Pack, who taught in a one-room schoolhouse in 1923, seems to have remembered the ultimate purpose for schooling, whether rural or urban:

It was a new experience for all of us — I don't think my pupils gained a high standard of scholarship ability or profound knowledge, but we did learn how to share and to give, to take and to lead, to read and to seek.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ PABC, Additional Manuscripts 347, vol. 2, file 2/27 (incoming and outgoing correspondence); Additional Manuscripts 44 (travel diary).

¹¹⁹ Letter from Miss Mary Pack, retired schoolteacher, Vancouver, April 1986.