

In The Beginning

The history of public education in The Pas predates the incorporation of the town and the inclusion of this part of the north in Manitoba. Initially, all the children had to attend the Indian School where Mr. Bagshaw was the teacher. With the move of aboriginal people to a reserve across the Saskatchewan River, the remaining residents began to organize in 1909 for the purpose of starting a school for their children.

Early Steps - Coming Together

On November 3, 1909, twenty-two citizens of the small community of Le Pas in the Northwest Territories gathered at the house of Mr. G. Halcrow, Manager of the Hudson's Bay Company store. They had come to discuss the possibility of establishing a public school for their fledgling community. Mr. G. Halcrow would act as the chair of the meeting and Mr. R. H. Bagshaw agreed to be the secretary. Other residents who attended were: Mr. Louis Bacon, Mr. Beatie, Mr. Bowering, Mr. Carier, Mr. John J. Cochrane, Mr. Louis Cochrane, Rev. B. Edwards, Mr. Fischer, Mr. Grant, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Arthur Halcrow, Mr. J. Halcrow, Mr. Haight, Mr. Kerr, Mr. Lindie, Mr. Rosser, Mr. Ed. Smith, Mr. Stephenson, and Mr. Walk.

The first decision made was to send a telegram to Ottawa to enquire if the Commissioner for the North West Territory, Mr. Fred White, had received the letters which had been sent to him the previous July requesting the establishment of a school district. Meanwhile, these residents decided to take action of their own to set up a school. The first problem was to obtain a building suitable for a school building as Le Pas had few structures that were spacious enough. Mr. J. Halcrow was asked if he could rent his house for such a purpose in the meantime and he agreed to do so for a rent of \$8.00 per month. The next decision was to appoint Mr. J. Halcrow, Mr. J. Gordon, and Rev. Edwards as managers of the school. Mr. Fischer agreed to lend some desks and some books for the school.

But how to finance the school's operation? One suggestion was to tax each child \$1.00 per month, but upon calculation of this revenue it was evident that this would not be sufficient. After discussion it was agreed to ask each parent what they would be willing to contribute each month. The amounts that were promised ranged from \$2 to \$6 (for a total of \$34) from the parents, and \$1.50 to \$5 (for a total of \$27) from the others. This was calculated to be \$61.00 per month, with payments made on the first Saturday of each month.

Mr. Gordon offered to provide a stove for the building, and the Hudson's Bay Company would provide some stove pipes. The Ruby Lake Company offered materials for a porch and agreed to build two "water closets." Others agreed to help out with the construction and it was decided to hire Mr. Kerr, a carpenter, to assist with this project.

As Reverend Edwards offered to provide instruction for the school until Christmas, he was replaced in his school manager's role by Mr. Haight. It was also decided that the school would run on "railroad time" from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

On December 29, 1909 the school committee met again to deal with correspondence received from Commissioner Fred White and an application from Mr. R.H. Anderson who had applied for the position of school teacher. It was agreed to hire Mr. Anderson for a six-month term for a salary of \$600 a year, with a school year set at 216 days. The school finances were reviewed. The sum of \$172.50 had been collected to date, with \$35.00 still owing. Mr. Halcrow agreed to lower the rent of his building to \$6.00 per month. The committee also agreed to order a new wood stove and stove pipes, and “let tenders for 20 cords of wood.” A discussion concluded that the school building could only be used for day school purposes, a decision that later on turned out to be controversial.

The first meeting of 1910 was held on February 7. The school committee had formalized itself as Mr. Halcrow (Chair), Mr. Bagshaw (Secretary), Mr. Rosser (Treasurer), and two trustees - Mr. Gordon and Mr., Haight. Financing the school’s operation was still a problem so it was agreed to approach Mr. Herman Finger (of the Finger Lumber Company) and Mr. Smith to ask “for a subscription (i.e., a contribution) toward the maintenance of the school.” It was also agreed to develop a list of the community residents and to approach them to raise \$350.00 for the 1910-11 school expenses. Mr. Finger did provide an annual subscription.

Another issue had to be faced. Teacher Anderson had written asking to be released from his position. When the committee asked for a reason, Mr. Anderson declined to give one and asked to be released by the end of March, the end of his term, leaving the committee with the task of seeking a replacement.

When next they met in March, Mr. Anderson was asked if he would stay for another quarter year, and if he did not the job would be offered to a Mr. Van Fauske who had written to apply for a position. Anderson agreed to do so. In addition the committee decided to approach Indian Affairs to apply for getting three lots upon which to put a school for the 1910-11 school year. On May 27 they learned that the lots they had wished to acquire had already been applied for by some other individuals, so it was agreed to continue to seek three lots for school purposes.



At the September 8, 1910 meeting the building of a new school was needed as soon as possible, and a contract was let to have a local carpenter make windows for the school house at a cost of \$5.25 per pair. The school was to be located on Larose Avenue, and was called Larose School. (After 1915 when a new brick school was built, Larose School was moved north of The Pas to Big Eddy for use by the non-Treaty Indians.) Meanwhile Mr. Fletcher of the Board of Education in Winnipeg

would be contacted regarding hiring a new teacher to start November 1.

At the December 2, 1910 meeting, Mr. Haight needed to be replaced as a trustee as he was going to be away from the community. It was agreed to defer this decision until an annual ratepayer meeting was held on Wednesday, December 28. In addition an agreement was to be drawn up for the new teacher, Mr. Henderson, regarding his salary, and duties, including lighting the fire at the school and sweeping the floor. For the later two tasks it was agreed to pay him an additional \$15.00 per month.

Decisions, Decisions

On December 28 an "Annual School Meeting" was held and Mr. Bunting was elected as the replacement trustee. A financial report noted revenues of \$981.83 with expenses of \$935.41 leaving a balance of \$46.42. On the topic of the use of the school house, Treasurer Rosser was adamant about restricting its use for school purposes only except for raising funds to pay off the debt of the school house, but even then it should be used with caution so no damage and no "ill feeling in the vicinity" resulted. Others present agreed for the alternate use of raising school funds (except for dances and religious purposes), and agreed that the school trustees could refuse a request in the interest of the community. Further such alternate use could only be done on a Friday evening, or holidays, so the building could be put back in order for school use.

The first trustee meeting of 2011 was held on January 4 in the Hudson's Bay Company office. A decision was made to buy some school desks, and to insure the school house for three years. The insurance rate was \$1.75 per \$100 value, with the value of the school placed at \$900.00 The Commissioner was still being written "regarding the organizing into a school section or District." It was also agreed that students should find out from their teacher what books they needed and that parents would have to supply these.

At the March 20, 1911 trustees meeting it was noted that the total value of materials for the school, insurance, and the teacher's salary came to \$1,137.45 (of which \$195.00 was the salary). As there was only \$22.51 in the treasury, it was agreed that "a subscription should be taken up towards the maintenance of the school, the Board not willing to raise funds by renting of the building..." A collector was appointed to contact community members. Another decision was to ask the teacher to make up the (16) days difference of school days not taught in November 2010 and for which he had been paid (and the NWT government had granted for this salary). He agreed to do so.

A special Board meeting was called to hear complaints made by parents against the teacher's teaching methods and the lack of progress among the pupils. In response the teacher asked to be made aware of complaints received by the trustees so he could address them as "he was not prepared to be dictated to with regard to his methods of teaching by parents, but by the Manitoba Board of Education." The teacher expressed a willingness to resign if his methods did not suit, but also noted that the school was in a backward state as no thorough teaching had been done prior to his arrival and he had to spend much time reviewing before proceeding with instruction. He found it to be discouraging work as he wanted to produce quality not quantity, He felt every child had a

claim on his interest and labour, but seven grades (in one classroom) presented a difficult problem that he was trying to solve. The teacher also noted that none of the trustees had ever visited the school to see firsthand the studies of the pupils, and he would heartily welcome such a visit. The trustees concluded that they had no complaints to make and in the future the teacher should forward any parental complaints to them. As a result of Treasurer Rosser's resignation, Mr. Bagshaw took on the combined position of Secretary-Treasurer.

A Controversy Faced

On March 23, 1911, a ratepayer meeting was called and chaired by teacher Henderson due to the "absence of school trustees." Secretary-Treasurer Bagshaw agreed to take minutes of this meeting which had been called, former Treasurer Rosser stated, because funds were greatly needed for the operation of the school and to pay off the school debt. He argued for the need for additional voluntary subscriptions (i.e., donations) even from the bachelors of the community. Rosser further argued that these young people desired the use of the school house for dancing as there was no other suitable building to be had, especially for a Masquerade Ball wanted for Easter Week, He noted the youth were prepared to pay \$2 a couple for this event, funds going to aid the school. Rosser felt this request couldn't be refused as there was a need for the funds and the Pool Room (the only other facility large enough) was not a fit place to hold a dance, especially with wives and daughters to be in attendance.

This dance request was objected to by Mr. Horace Halcrow, who stated if necessary he would pay more toward the school, but Mr. John Bacon felt that the school should be open to any use by subscribers, and any dances should also be open to any wanting to attend. It was agreed to establish a delegate's "Committee for Entertainments in the School House" representing both married and single men to review this issue.

The subsequent delegates meeting heard Mr. Rusk complain that "people were tired of subscribing and not receiving any privilege or benefit". He further noted it would be a pity for the school to have to close for lack of funds when it could be rented out for dances. Young people wanted this use he stated as there was no other public building available.

Mr. Halcrow then offered to tender his resignation so as not to stand in the way of opening usage, but this was objected to as it was not a school board meeting so a resignation could not be accepted. Mr. Fleming, the designated person to collect subscriptions, noted he was getting much abuse when trying to collect subscriptions as many felt funds were being raised under false pretenses. Mr. Bunting had a change of heart upon hearing young people had contributed subscriptions, and noted he was now in favour of dances at the school. A procedure was clarified for replacing trustee Halcrow, who insisted on resigning, In frustration the Committee for Entertainments resigned as they felt they were unable to change the School Board's opposition to dances.

More Decisions and Some Progress

At the May 8, 1911 school trustees meeting the teacher asked the board to consider

procuring a second teacher as there were too many students for one teacher. The Board complained that it had no funds to do so, and suggested that the teacher use older students to teach the younger ones. They did agree to purchase a school register (to record enrolment and attendance) but asked the teacher to get student volunteers to sweep and wash the floor. He was also given permission to use a half day of school for cleaning the school yard.

At the October 18 meeting there was still a concern about raising funds for school desks, paying the teacher salary, and the interest on monies borrowed to build the school. At the November 16 meeting, teacher Henderson offered to continue his contract for another three months, at a salary of \$65 per month, and to continue to light the fire for the winter.

The first meeting of 1912 held on January 10 saw Mr. Halcrow reappointed as Board chair. It was decided to petition the Deputy Minister of Education in Winnipeg to organize a school district for The Pas, and the Board undertook to survey the number of school age children (ages 5-16). Mr. Halcrow was charged with producing a map showing the proposed boundaries of the intended school district, and a voluntary subscription for 1912 school maintenance was agreed upon.

The June 28, 1912 meeting was described as the final meeting of this Board. The Pas had become incorporated within Manitoba in May 1912 and The Pas School District #1635 was established, the first in northern Manitoba.

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April 15, 2017

Information Sources:

Kelsey School Division: School Committee Board minutes: 1909-1915