

Mill Bay school has had real impact

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Population in Mill Bay area was growing and in 1918 the Shawnigan School District divided into four separate districts: Cobble Hill, Mill Bay, Shawnigan and Sylvania. The school's name was officially changed to Mill Bay School.

By 1929, the former 1896 schoolhouse, had been sold to Thomas Wilkinson for lumber.

At the end of 1928-1929 the four school districts were consolidated into one to have one large, central school to meet all needs.

The name "Plantagenet" was chosen for this new district because "planta genesta" was the Latin term for the broom that abounded in the area. A provincial order-in-council created the Plantagenet School District and dissolved the four previous districts.

There was much opposition to the new district from ratepayers who were also facing a substantial increase in taxation. The dispute ended up in the B.C. Supreme Court.

On April 29, 1930 Mr. Justice Murphy ruled the consolidation of the four districts was illegal because of improper notice.

Plantagenet School District was abolished as of July 1, 1930. The districts of Bench, Cobble Hill, Mill Bay and Sylvania were re-created.

The next big question for Mill Bay School ratepayers was school lighting. In a 1935 meeting trustees debated adding more windows or install electric lighting. The board chairman broke a tied vote in favour of electric light.

During Mill Bay School's annual Christmas concert in 1935, Tierney Patrick Barry, a former student and son of land donor John Barry, now a grandfather, was Santa Claus.

In 1946 the school came under the authority of School District No. 65 (Cowichan) which had closed Sylvania School and transferred its students to Mill Bay School. Great consternation was expressed by parents due to generally inadequate space.

Bayview School on Deloume Road in Mill Bay opened as a new K-7 school in 1950 and took off some pressure.

In 1958 a new addition was made to Mill Bay School. Residents pitched in by providing four bulldozers, a one-wheel tractor and a grader. Students helped by picking roots and stones. The whole clearing job was completed in seven hours at no cost to School District No. 65!

By 1977, an open-area classroom complex had been added to the school, which now served Grades 3 to 7 only.

Cobble Hill I took in the kindergarten classes, Bayview, the grade one classes and Cobble Hill II, the grade two classes, as Mill Bay annexes. Meanwhile, the 1914 schoolhouse continued as a music classroom.

School District 79 (Cowichan Valley) was created in 1996. By the 2000's, Bayview, Cobble Hill I and Cobble Hill II schools had been closed and sold off, and Cobble Hill Elementary School constructed.

A French Immersion program was moved into Mill Bay School and its name changed to École Mill Bay Elementary.

This brings us to 2013, and the permanent closure of the school.

What a history this school has had! How many teachers, students, parents and community members have passed through its doors over the past century?

It may be closed and boarded up, but it certainly is not forgotten!

Carolyn Prellwitz is a retired SD79 teacher, and secretary of the Cowichan Valley Schools Heritage Society. The first half of this piece ran Wednesday. Look for it on Cowichannewsleader.com.