

Two Pioneer Cowichan Valley Teachers

The United Nations' World Teachers' Day, held every year since 1994, celebrates the role of teachers in providing quality education. This is a good opportunity to reminisce about two of the early teachers in the Cowichan Valley and their contributions to the students and communities in which they taught.

Part One: William Henry Lomas

William Henry Lomas was the first public school teacher in the Cowichan Valley. He arrived at Cowichan Bay in August 1862 along with 77 other settlers on HMS Hecate and pre-empted some land on the east side of Somenos Lake. Born in 1839 in Derbyshire, England he had obtained a teaching certificate from the Royal College of Preceptors. The latter organization was originally founded in 1846 as the Society of Teachers to pioneer formal training by examination for teachers.

A log building was built by settlers on the west side of Somenos Lake, the location of which is marked by a cairn at the BC Discovery Centre. This log structure served as church, school and meeting hall for the early pioneers. It was here that the Valley's first public school opened on April 1, 1864 with 11 children ranging in age from 4 to 15 years in the classroom. Mr. Lomas had been recommended as teacher by Reverend Alexander Charles Garrett; his duties including rowing a number of children from the east side of Somenos Lake before school opened each morning and returning them after school ended.

Reverend Garrett was very supportive of the school. He noted in a letter dated April 7, 1865 that he had examined the students the previous day and found their progress satisfactory and a credit to Mr. Lomas.

A report dated July 10, 1867 from Mr. Lomas to the Board of Education in Victoria noted the school used 1st, 2nd and 3rd English readers, Thomason's Arithmetic and Mitchell's Atlas and that there was no blackboard in the building. Mr. Lomas stopped teaching at Somenos School about 1871 by which time he had been appointed Indian Catechist at the Anglican Mission House at the junction of Tzouhalem and Maple Bay Roads.

He resumed teaching in the public system in 1874 on alternate days at the 1st Bench and 1st Koksilah Schools, crossing the Cowichan River by ferry to travel to the two schools six days a week. His pay was \$50 per month, which he declared was barely sufficient to support his growing family, keep a horse and pay ferry fares to and from school.

Canute Lemo enrolled at Bench School the same fall 1874 that Mr. Lomas arrived as teacher. According to former Cowichan historian Nathan Paul Dougan, Canute was the first First Nations student at a public school in the province. His mother had been taught by the nuns at St. Ann's Convent and she wanted her son to be educated as "an English gentleman". Canute was present at the official opening of the current Bench School in December 1950. Then over 80 years of age, composed and dignified, he told the gathering of his school days under Mr. Lomas: "It was because my father was Indian interpreter to the magistrates of Cowichan and could speak the English tongue that he desired me to have instruction in Mr. Lomas' school. My mother accompanied me to school that first day, each of us riding a pony. Thereafter I had a pony for myself, for it was a long way to go."

Mr. Lomas' standing in the classroom was well respected. His inspection report for February 1878 read: "The pupils exhibited a fair knowledge of grammar, read creditably on the whole, and in some cases

very well, and generally had made satisfactory progress in geography, history, spelling and arithmetic. The teacher is painstaking and maintains good order.”

Twin brothers Robert John Manley and William George Manley were also students of Mr. Lomas. When he was 78 years old, William narrated one account of his school days to a reporter in 1946. During one school lunch time he had walked down to the Cowichan Wharf and was late returning to class. Warned, yet overcome by curiosity of the happenings at the wharf, he nevertheless repeated his misdemeanor. The result was some punitive strokes across the palm of his hand by Mr. Lomas. Remembering the event with a youthful smile on his face, William proudly reported, “He didn’t hurt me!”

Mr. Lomas retained his post as schoolmaster until April 5, 1881 when he was appointed the first Indian Agent for the Cowichan Indian Agency.

He continued his involvement in education and served as a school trustee/Secretary-Treasurer for the Quamichan School District from 1883-1884. In 1886 he wrote a letter to William Smith, BC Premier, to report that nothing had been done about the drainage of the grounds of Quamichan School, then located on what is today Indian Road, and that the outhouses needed fitting with earth boxes that could be removed. He also was the mover of a resolution which passed at the annual meeting of the voters of the district in June 1888 that the trustees take whatever steps were necessary to secure a water supply for the school.

William Henry Lomas died at age in 1899 in Duncan. At least four of his grandchildren later taught in the public system in the Cowichan Valley (Gladys Edith William Lomas, Sheila Dwyer and Kathleen Dwyer, Althea Lemar Clague).

By Carolyn Prellwitz

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Part Two: Mrs. Annie Monk

Ann Brown was born in 1843 in Warrington, Lancashire England. Her father was a basket-maker and she had at least nine other siblings. She married Alfred Monks, a Professor of Music, in 1863 in Warrington.

Mrs. Monk emigrated from England to Canada with her four children in 1875, settling first in Hamilton, Ontario as a music teacher. Her husband had remained in England.

Later Mrs. Monk moved to British Columbia and taught at Mayne Island School from October 1883 to January 31, 1884. Apparently she found the isolated setting of Mayne Island very difficult, particularly with a young growing family. She even wrote a letter to the BC Superintendent of Education lamenting that there was no local store where she could buy wool for the booties she was knitting for the new addition to his family.

In February 1884 she began teaching in the Quamichan School District at the Anglican Mission House located at the junction of Maple Bay and Tzouhalem Roads. Finally in July 1885 the newly completed wood-frame one-room Quamichan School on Indian Road was opened. Mrs. Monk was its first teacher. In a 1936 memoir she wrote: "The desks and seats were quite crude – probably made by local carpenters. My desk was also of the same type. We had one big blackboard and several large maps. . . . It was some time before all my pupils assembled, but their number increased almost daily and in about two months' time I had a class of about sixty. Many of them came from a distance, some as far as five miles."

On April 11, 1884 she attended a very pleasant entertainment and social gathering at the Maple Bay Agricultural Hall. The event, under the auspices of the Somenos Methodist Church, included readings, singing and recitations. Mrs. Monk was one of those who took a leading part in the programme. By example Mrs. Monk encouraged her students to organize and have concerts themselves. Her pupils showed such a remarkable tendency for singing that she acquired an organ - the first in the district - to accompany them.

The Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia for the year ending July 31, 1885 noted that there had been an increase in attendance at Quamichan School and that "the lady in charge is an experienced and painstaking teacher. The salary of the teacher has been raised to \$55 per month."

In August 1886 the E & N passenger train was on its second run ever from Victoria to Nanaimo, this time carrying the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. MacDonald, and Robert Dunsmuir, the president of the railway. It was stopped at Duncan's Crossing by a crowd of about 2000 people petitioning for a station to be built there. Mrs. Monk later reported that "the train stood still long enough for me to have my pupils sing their song 'Welcome to you all', which they sang quite well and joyfully." The outcome of that train stoppage and petition was the construction of the Duncan Train Station and birth of what it today the City of Duncan.

Mrs. Monk lived in a home on the Cowichan Bay flats. High water often made her late to school with her wet, muddy skirts showing signs of her journey. However, she made a lasting impression on her students. Personality and character were included in her list of subjects. Knitting and needlework, for which she was famous, were taught to the girls, and manners to the boys!

Mrs. Monk sold her property in April 1887 and two months later ended her teaching contract at Quamichan School in order to relocate in Victoria. She had a total of 32 students in grades 1 to 8 in her classroom in her last year of teaching.

Mrs. Monk remained active in the Duncan community. She and her daughter, Florence, regularly sang together at local concerts. One duet at the Agricultural Hall in Duncan in May 1889 was so well received that the pair were encored for more. Meanwhile, Mrs. Monk's husband, Alfred, continued to work as a teacher of music in England. He died at age 47 years in Yorkshire in 1891.

Mrs. Monk celebrated her 92nd birthday in 1935 in Duncan at the home of her daughter, Florence, where she received a number of letters and visitors. She died at the home of her daughter, Maude, in Portland, Oregon in 1940. Her grandson, Mr. Eldon W. Kier, now in his 90's and living in Duncan, was a teacher in the Valley at Duncan Junior-Secondary and Cowichan Secondary Schools.

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