

Remembering Lake Cowichan's First High School

In June 1937 Lake Cowichan ratepayers approved the construction of the community's first high school.

A site on Renfrew Avenue was purchased and construction was well under way by mid-August 1937. Grades 8-12 would be housed in the building measuring 32 x 66 feet.

29 students and two teachers – John Ferdinand Tupper Saywell and Charles Henry Robinson Pillar - moved into the new building in January 1938. It had two classrooms, two cloak rooms, two recreation rooms, running water with drinking fountains, lavatories and hand-basins, and was even wired for electric light! A large furnace provided heat.

The first high school graduation in the form of a banquet was held in the community hall in June 1940. A 15-piece school orchestra began in the 1942-1943 school year with a choir added the following year.

Population in the Lake Cowichan area continued to boom and within seven years of its opening, the area's first high school was already too small. A 12-acre site was purchased on South Shore Road with a new larger high school constructed and ready by September 1944.

The first high school on Renfrew Avenue continued in use as a public elementary school until June 1969 when it was re-purposed as the Lake Cowichan School District administration offices. At some time the schoolhouse and property were sold and today is the site of Lisa's Fit Stop. It had provided education to countless number of Lake Cowichan schoolchildren for thirty-two years.

The Cowichan Valley Schools Heritage Society (CVSHS) has been working to document the histories of former schools in the Cowichan Valley, and recognizing them with the erection of small school-belled shaped signs as close to their original locations as possible.

At 4:45 pm on Monday, June 5, 2017 – during Lake Days 2017 – a CVSHS schoolbell sign marking Lake Cowichan School will be unveiled at 29 Renfrew Avenue, Lake Cowichan. Former students, teachers and members of the community are invited to attend the event. Please bring along your class photos, schoolhouse photos, stories and memories to share with those in attendance.

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Secretary-Treasurer, CVSHS
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