

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Bench School (1950-current)

The newly formed Board of School District No. 65 (Cowichan) held its inaugural meeting on Friday, April 26, 1946 at which time the fact that 46 students were being taught in the one-room schoolhouse at Bench was discussed. A year later the Board recognized that a new school was urgently needed in the area. Another year passed.

Hubert Savage of Victoria, BC was hired in March 1948 by the Board as the architect for the new school.

At the Board meeting in May 1948, it was reported that the title for the current site of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bench School had not yet been transferred into the name of the School District No. 65 and that this matter needed to be placed in the hands of a lawyer, which the Board agreed should be done.

In a January 1948 district-wide vote on its building by-law, the school board obtained the mandate from the community at large to proceed with the plans to build a new two-classroom school for \$27,000 in the Bench area. In December 1948 the school board purchased an additional 2.5 acres of land on the east side of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bench School property from Mr. O. W. Maxwell for \$750. It was not until June 1950, after 28 months effort, the school board finally secured the tender to build the school within the \$27,000 appropriated in the building by-law passed in January 1948.

The new two-room Bench School was finally constructed and opened in December 1950. It featured an automatic oil furnace and hot and cold water running from gleaming faucets into spotless basins and sinks. Its only tie with the past was the old hand schoolbell that had been used in the previous three Bench schools, although not the original bell that assembled the first Bench class in the spring of 1873.



4<sup>th</sup> Bench School, circa 1950

Two students from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bench School were present at the official opening – John J. Dougan and Canute Lemo. Now past 80 years of age and leaning on his cane, Canute told the gathering at the official opening: *“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."*

Two students from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bench School were also present at the official opening – Nathan Paul Dougan and Group Captain Joseph Stewart Temple Fall.



Former Bench Students at the official opening of Bench School, December 1950  
Back Row: Joseph Stewart Temple Fall, Nathan Paul Dougan, Jim Wood, Ted Shearing, Dan Dougan  
Front Row: Canute Lemo, Ashley Porter, John J. Dougan, Jack Verdier, Steve Dougan

The first teachers in the new 4<sup>th</sup> Bench School were Head Teacher, Miss Margaret Lydia Askham, who taught grades 1-3 in the classroom nearest the farm beside the school, and Mr. Grant Makepeace Garnett who taught grades 4-6 in the classroom nearest Cowichan Bay Road. Miss Askham would later serve as the school's first principal from 1953-1968.



Bench School, 1950-1951, Grades 1-3 with teacher, Miss Margaret Lydia Askham

By 1974 the 4<sup>th</sup> Bench School had expanded to 11 classrooms, a library and a gymnasium and had 12 teachers and 330 students. 105 years of education at Bench Schools were celebrated in the 4<sup>th</sup> Bench School that year.

Now 72 years old, the 4<sup>th</sup> Bench School located at 1501 Cowichan Bay Road, Cowichan Bay, BC is still in use today (2023) with 370 students in kindergarten through to Grade 7.

By Carolyn Prellwitz, Secretary-Treasurer  
Cowichan Valley Schools Heritage Society  
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