

## Remembering Sahtlam Schools

Sahtlam School began in 1890 in a rent-free empty house on Menzies Road owned by John Blair, the landscape architect credited with the landscaping at Beacon Hill Park in Victoria. The first teacher was his daughter, Jeannie Wallace Blair. She had ten students and was paid \$30/month salary.

Meanwhile a few Sahtlam residents independently formed the Sahtlam School board and constructed a sturdy log schoolhouse complete with desks and a stove on land owned by Daniel Currie along the wagon road to Cowichan Lake. It was not until that schoolhouse was built that the new school board approached the BC Department of Education in November 1891 for assistance in covering some of their costs: \$40 to keep them out of debt plus \$40 for incidental expenses and \$10/month towards the teacher salary.

Between 1891 and 1918 the *Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia* included the following statement about the school: "Instruction was continuing in a private building owned by residents."



Sahtlam School, May 1919

While Sahtlam School District was created by the BC Government in 1918, ownership of the land on which the schoolhouse stood took another 3 years to become a formality. In 1922 Daniel Currie's son, John Currie, registered title to the farm. He then immediately sold the small parcel known as Lot 2, Section 9, Range 9 to the trustees of Sahtlam School District for \$100. By this time Sahtlam Schoolhouse was the last log edifice in the district that had been originally erected for school purposes. At thirty-two years of age it was now time for replacement.

A new wooden schoolhouse with outbuildings was erected by Mr. Adolphus Whitburn of Duncan, BC in 1922 for \$2180. The original log schoolhouse remained in place as a play space for the children until it was demolished sometime after 1931.

In her 1923 report to the BC Department of Education, teacher Honora Theresa Staneland wrote: "The schoolhouse is new and consists of one room and a small cloak room. The majority of children come from Hillcrest Lumber Mill."

One side of the schoolhouse had a lot of windows which provided much light, but when it got dark an oil lamp on the teacher's desk and one hanging from the centre of the ceiling were used. The students had individual desks and used nibbed pens and inkwells for their schoolwork. Wood for the stove was kept in a woodshed behind the school. Boys were in charge of chopping the wood and kindling for the stove. They took turns doing this duty and were paid \$5 a month. The girls took turns cleaning the schoolroom and also received \$5 a month.

A brass plaque bearing the names of two former pupils, Henry John Payne and Charles Stuart Jordan, was mounted in the school library and unveiled in November 1931. Both men had been killed during World War I.

Former student Bob White attended Sahtlam School from 1936 to 1944. He recalled that he 'walked one mile to school every day. We had a cloakroom to hang up our wet clothes. We started school at 9:00 and finished at 3:00. There were about 25 to 30 students. The teacher's name was Miss Fraser and she drove a Studebaker with a rumble seat. We used to play ball at recess and lunch time.'

Another former student, Joseph Svetich, recalled Miss Fraser as 'a good teacher, very devoted to her work and her pupils were respectful of her. She was very interested in having the students participate in competitive sports days and took it upon herself to set this up with other schools such as Paldi and Hillcrest Schools. The school was heated by a stove which was lit by a janitor at seven every morning. The students and the teacher were responsible during the day to add wood to the fire. The screen around this huge stove was installed for safety but we also used it to dry our wet mittens and shoes on.'

The lack of a teacher closed Sahtlam School at the beginning of January 1944. There were 26 students in grades 1-8 registered. It took the board three weeks to find a replacement so 'Christmas vacation' was a little long that year.

In 1946 Sahtlam School came under the mandate of the newly created School District No.65 (Cowichan). Two years later, it and Bamberton School to the south were the only one-room schools in the new district having students in grades 1 to 8 in the same classroom.



Sahtlam School Class, 1952-1953 with Miss Harriet Bolt, Teacher

A new flat-roofed stucco school was built beside the second schoolhouse in 1955. Both schoolhouses continued to be in use for classrooms for at least a decade. A second classroom was added in 1961 to the 1955 building so there were now three classrooms in operation. In September 1965 grades 5 & 6 students were transferred to Tansor School and the 1922 schoolhouse was demolished about 1968. At the same time Sahtlam School became an annex of Tansor School for grades 1-4 only. This situation prevailed for 37 years.

In 2002 Sahtlam School was closed in a wave of budget cuts by School District No. 79 (Cowichan Valley). There was much protest from the local community which wanted to purchase the site as it was the “last visible part of Sahtlam’s history”. This did not happen; instead the school district sold the four-acre property including the school building in 2008 to private owners, Barry and Rose Lehna.

The Lehnas recognized the desire of the community to commemorate their school history and agreed to the installation of four signs about the former Sahtlam Schools on the fence enclosing their property.

At 2:00 pm on Saturday, May 26, 2018 a fifth sign will be unveiled at the site by the Cowichan Valley Schools Heritage Society (CVSHS). This Society has been working to document the histories of former schools in the area and recognizing them with the erection of schoolbell-shaped signs as close to their original locations as possible.

Former students and teachers, former Hillcrest Lumber Company employees and members of the Cowichan Valley community are invited to attend the unveiling of the new sign at 4410 Old Lake

Cowichan Road. Please bring along your class photos, schoolhouse photos, and memories to share with those in attendance.

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