

**Assignment #3**

**ED-B-591 (P02)**

**Dr. R. F. Campbell**

**CANADIAN EDUCATION: A HISTORY**  
**"A Brief History of School District #64 (Gulf Islands)"**

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On June 15, 1938 a special meeting of the qualified voters of the Ganges Harbour School District met to vote on the following resolution:

That this district is in favor of consolidation of the Rural School Districts of Burgoyne, Cranberry Marsh, Divide, Ganges Harbour, North Vesuvius and Vesuvius, provided the Department of Education gives sufficient assistance to the Consolidation District to enable it to finance at the tax rate of not more than six (6) mills. (Minutes, School District #64)

The taxpayers voted on this resolution and the result was 103 in favor and 6 against. The consolidated school became known as Salt Spring Island United School and was to enrol grades 1-12. How this resolution came about and the creation of School District #64 (Gulf Islands) will form the basis of this paper.

The first Canadian school west of the Rocky Mountains was established at Fort Victoria in 1849 and in 1862 the first mainland school opened at New Westminister. In February 1856 "The Executive Council of Vancouver Island apointed Rev. Edward Cridge (1817 - 1913) a one man committee to report on school." (Wilson, Stamp, Audet, 1970, p. 251). This appointment today is recognized as the appointment of the first Superintendent of schools in the Colony and Province.

The first School Act was passed in 1865 and it established a highly centralized school system with the Governor of the Colony and an appointed nine-man General Board to oversee the educational programs. In addition the Governor appointed the Superintendent of Schools, the teachers and

local school Trustees. This Board also was responsible for School Districts, and prescribed the curriculum and textbooks, defined the duties of trustees and teachers, and determined school discipline.

Before the Civil War broke out in the United States many blacks moved northward into Canada seeking their freedom. Some of these arrived in Victoria in the 1850's and Sir James Douglas and the Hudson Bay Company gave them land on their farm islands located off the Saanich Coast. Many of these people settled on Salt Spring Island at this time and the first teacher on Salt Spring Island came from this group. For ten years John C. Jones moved from farm to farm providing formal and informal educational training to the people in the northern parts of this island. His school was the kitchens, barns and meeting places of the families.

As the population increased on Salt Spring Island demands grew to formalize the educational system and to get financial support from Victoria. In 1864 permission was granted for a school to be established at Central which would serve the northern part of Salt Spring Island with Mr. Jones to be the first teacher and to be paid an annual salary of \$500.00 which was not retroactive (Hamilton, 1969, p. 24).

Central School was the first school district on Salt Spring Island and like the others that were to be established in the Gulf Islands, it had a three man school board to run its affairs. Johnson (1984:41) outlined their

responsibilities which included the right: to build the facility; to see that authorized textbooks were used; to tax the ratepayers; to record the minutes and to pass such resolutions to maintain the school; and to see that the school functioned according to the regulations. In addition they had to report the enrolments, administer the government grants and ensure that the community expectations were upheld as to the character of the teacher. They did not at this time appoint or dismiss teachers or fix their salaries.

With the formation of this school district and up to the unification vote of 1938 there were eight separate school districts established on Salt Spring Island all with a similar mandate (Appendix #1). In addition in the 1920's Ganges had become the hub of the island and all public secondary education programs were found here. In 1925 the increased enrolments caused the high school students to be moved to a chicken house used to exhibit poultry by the Farmers' Institute. (This school today is fondly called the "Chicken House" by its former students.)

What were the reasons for this move towards unification of the Island Schools? Transportation had improved and it became feasible to bus students to a larger unit, and this created savings in the operation by increasing enrolments and decreasing the number of staff. The Depression had hurt the funding for the rural schools and they were in a state of disrepair as a result. Many dollars would be needed to up-grade aging

buildings. Small school boards were finding it difficult to raise funds for operating their schools. Inexpensive teachers were hired to cut costs and they were expected to do repairs and custodial jobs. Living conditions were poor and inconsistent and many young women teachers experienced a great deal of difficulty in the rural areas. World War II also created staffing problems in the rural districts and many schools existed with minimum staffing and student enrolments. Teachers changed frequently and often the school was left unopened until the replacement arrived.

These concerns reached the Department of Education in Victoria and in 1939 The honorable Dr. Weir, Minister of Education, visited Salt Spring Island and agreed there was a need for improved educational facilities and promised to assist the district. Hence the resolution of 1938 which was set up to gain this support and establish a Consolodated School.

The new high school facility promised by Dr. Weir created a demand for a consolidated school from grades 1-12 to be housed in Ganges. Toynbee (1975 :62) stated that by 1940 the number of schools had been reduced to three as a result of the opening of the Consolidated School at Ganges and the institution of school bus service". All students entered this school in 1941, when it opened, with the exception of the elementary students at Beaver Point, Isabella Point and Burgoyne Bay. It provided the latest in technical support and the school was built with grants and volunteer labor and donations and it opened debt free in 1941.

Burgoyne Bay students arrived the following year and in 1945 with the adoption of the Cameron Report, Beaver Point Elementary and Isabella Point Elementary students were incorporated into School District #64 (Gulf Islands). It was, however, not until 1951 when the Beaver Point school was closed that all students attended Ganges Consolidated School.

"At the time of the closing of this school, the building, which still stands (and is used as a pre-school) had been used continuously for classes longer than any other school in British Columbia" (Toynbee, p. 64). In 1945 the Gulf Islands School Board was given nine seats to represent the area. The breakdown for each Island was as follows: North Salt Spring 3 seats, South Salt Spring 2 seats, Pender 1 seat, Mayne 1 seat, Galiano 1 seat, Saturna 1 seat.

Other district island schools were established as the need arose with the first Outer Island school established on Mayne Island in 1883. This school was to serve South Galiano Island, Mayne Island and some students from Saturna Island boarded on the Island and attended school there. In 1894 a replacement school was constructed on Mayne Island and this new school is now the present school library.

Residents of Pender Island established the North Pender Island School District in 1893 and the South Pender Island District in 1925. The southern school was closed in 1941 and the Pender Islands Rural School district was

created. This combined school is now the community library and seniors' center.

Galiano Island opened its first school in 1890 in the Montague Harbour area and in 1894 Galiano South opened. Later these schools would be combined approximately halfway between them to create one school for Galiano Island. Saturna Elementary School, the last of the island schools, was opened in 1919 but was not listed in the Cameron Report which in 1945 recommended the consolidation of over 650 Separate British Columbia School Districts to a total of 74 (Appendix 2). However this school has served Saturna Island continuously since opening and today it is a modern two room school.

The Gulf Islands School District is a consolidation of 14 rural school districts, with many of them on the original site and incorporating some of the original building (see attached map for the comparison). We are still a rural district but we have over 100 teachers and 1300 students on five separate islands with an integrated transportation system to serve the needs of our many communities and students. The History of this district places us in the forefront of the Educational Development of this province as some of the first school districts established in the colony of British Columbia were on Salt Spring Island.

The Gulf Islands has become a unique area in the province. This study

was undertaken to co-ordinate a brief history of the School District. It has attempted to take current brief references and consolidate them to show the development of this district. The process is not unlike all rural districts in the province. The early conditions, the commitment to public education and the interest of the citizens to provide a sound educational program still exist. This district represents the people of British Columbia as it reflects a diverse group of people, a mixed economy and a society that supports and involves itself in the educational process.

*As one of two papers submitted  
adequate. At some times you  
might like to add something  
on the history of the school  
of education, the administration,  
the financing, relations with  
the public, the Ministry,  
& other topics.*

*A pleasure to know you.*

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✓ Toynbee, Richard Mouat. Snapshots of Early Salt Spring and other Favoured Islands. Morriss Printing Company Ltd., Victoria, BC, 1975.

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Government of British Columbia Documents:

- (a) Public Schools Report. One Hundredth Annual Report. 1970/71. Ministry of Education, 1972.
- (b) Public Schools Report. Twenty-Second Annual Report. 1892-93. Department of Education, 1893.
- (c) Report of the Royal Commission on Education. Province of British Columbia, 1960.
- (d) Minutes. School District #64, Special Meeting, June 15, 1938.

## Appendix 1

## School District #64 (Gulf Islands)

This district is a consolidation of the following rural school districts:

## A. Salt spring Island Rural School districts

- (1) Beaver Point (1885)(1885)
- (2) Isabella Point (1905)(1905)
- \*(3) Burgoyne Bay (1901)(1873)
- \*(4) Cranberry Marsh (1910)(1911)
- \*(5) Vesuvius (Central) (1864)(1864) ✓
- \*(6) Vesuvius (North) (1896)(1870) ✓
- \*(7) Divide (1923)(1921)
- \*(8) Ganges Harbour (1891)(1896)
- \*(9) Ganges High School (1927)

\* Joined together June 15, 1938 to form Salt Spring Island United Rural School District.

## B. Pender Islands

- (1) North Pender (1893\_ (1894)
- (2) South Pender (1925) Closed 1941\*  
(1923) Closed (1941)

\* Pender Island rural School District Created

## C. Galiano Island

- (1) Galiano North (1890) (1892)
- (2) Galiano south (1894) (1900)

## D. Mayne Island School District (1883) (This is the first school in the Outer Gulf Islands.) (1883)

## E. Saturna Island (Opened in 1919)(1919)

## Appendix 2

Under the Cameron Report (1945), the following rural districts became School District #64 (Gulf Islands):

PUBLIC SCHOOLS REPORT  
District #64

School	Enrolment	Grades
Senior High-Elementary		
- Saltspring Island United	245	1-12
Elementary		
- Beaver Point	18	1-8
- Isabella Point	15	1-8
- Galiano North	20	1-8
- South Galiano	21	1-6 & 8
- Mayne Island	26	1-6 & 8
- Pender Island Rural	23	1-6 & 8
- Saturna	9	1-4 & 7