

4276 Gordon Head Rd.,  
Victoria, B.C.  
Feb. 9 /63

The Principal Bennett School,  
Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Sir:-

I am not sure whether your school or any Edmonton Schools have historical records, but as Bennett School is nearing its 50th Anniversary, I thought a few facts about its beginning might be of interest.

When Alberta became a Province and Edmonton was chosen as its Capital City the population increased rapidly and both the Edmonton School District and the Strathcona School District on the South Side had difficulty supplying classrooms for the growing population of children.

Edmonton School Board built the Donald Ross School on the flat below McDougal Hill and in 1912 Strathcona started a similiarly planned building on what was then known as Gallagher Flats, which was to be called the Bennett School on completion.

When classes opened in 1912, they opened a temporary classroom in a frame two-story house behind, and I believe on the property owned and operated by the Edmonton City Dairy, a few hundred yards from the low level bridge. The teacher was Miss B. Cook and so many pupils turned up at the opening that she just could not cope with them. The School Board then made immediate plans to convert the upstairs of this home into a classroom and supply an outside entrance by a stairway and I will enclose a snapshot of this building.

I arrived in Edmonton from Ontario about the middle of September and made application as a teacher on the Edmonton School Staff. My application was accepted and as Edmonton and Strathcona Districts were being ~~amalgamated~~ amalgamated I was assigned to this room with the promise that I would be Principal of Bennett when it was opened in the Spring of 1913.

Both rooms were crowded and conditions for teaching were very difficult from both the pupils and teachers stand-points but with the new School ahead we made the best of it.



Bennett School was completed and turned over to the School Board for occupancy at Easter 1913 and on our last day of School, before Easter, we organized a Grand March to the new School, each carrying their own books etc. and also as much of the classroom supplies as they were able.

I am sure the pupils of that day still remember the pride they had in their new School, as they inspected it and planned to return to it after Easter vacation.

There was some shuffling of teachers at the beginning but we soon settled down in four classrooms with Miss Johnson, Miss McDonald, Miss Lobb and myself as teachers.

In that summer a railroad was pushing its way north to the much talked of Peace River Country, but had only reached Smith on the Athabasca River that Fall. Summer transportation was almost non-existent, owing to lack of roads and bridges over muskegs. However, in the late Fall, when the rivers froze over, hundreds of settlers who had gone in earlier, came out with their horses and oxen to freight in supplies for another year and many hundreds more were planning to go in over the frozen trails.

I probably inherited an over-supply of pioneer blood and persuaded myself and the girl I loved that we should marry and join the trek to the Promised Land.

I handed my resignation in to the School Board on Feb 10 1914, to take effect the end of the month, and during the first week in March 1914 we left by caboose, on a horse drawn sleigh for a 350 mile trip to the Griffin Creek District, north of Peace River.

Mail and news were very slow reaching us for the first couple of years and we soon lost touch with the doings at Bennett School, but I did hear that Miss Johnston became Mrs Fraser. I was succeeded by Mr Hustler, who was Principal of Bennett for many years. We also heard of the disastrous flood in 1915 that destroyed so many homes of my former pupils.

I hope this review has some interest to your staff and pupils. It has revived many happy memories for me of my association with the staff and pupils of Bennett School, at its beginning, as I recall them.

I might also add that the girl that joined me on that first long trail is still travelling with me and when we look back on the many trails we have travelled since then, we remember some rough places but they always seemed to lead us to a Happy Stopping Place. For that and many other blessings we are truly thankful.

Yours sincerely,

*Ed Bell*