

THOSE “GOOD” OLD SCHOOL DAYS

Students today in modern classrooms with computers and smartphones may find it interesting to contrast school life on Texada 100 years ago.

After morning farm chores children walked to their one-room schoolhouse and warmed up around the woodstove. Older boys would have already carried in firewood and buckets of water. Each student had their own tin dipping cup.

In Blubber Bay the boys pulled the rope in the cloakroom to ring the 600lb bell, an action which often lifted smaller kids off their feet!

With no electricity lighting was poor, especially in winter. Students struggled with “penmanship”, first using slate tablets wiped clean with wet rags while older students wrote in copybooks using straight pen and inkwells. Pupils sat on benches (later replaced by rows of desks with flip-up seats).

Learning aids such as textbooks, maps and charts were only available through fundraising. Parents helped maintain the building and constructed furniture, as needed.

No running water meant using an outhouse or the woods. Hallowe’en often resulted in re-erecting a tipped-over privy.

Gymnasiums were non-existent so PE was held outdoors. Poor weather meant calisthenics beside one’s desk.

Misbehaviour resulted in being assigned to the chair beside the teacher’s desk. More serious infractions led to “the strap.” (One newly-hired teacher asserted her authority by strapping 12 students on the first day, 13 on the second!)

Most rural teachers were young women away from home in their first assignment and often subject to criticism and personal harassment. Some teachers married local men but rules forced them to resign at that point.

Both teacher and students dreaded the yearly visit of the Provincial Inspector who evaluated “everything.” Duncan Ross recalled a “sour-faced greybeard” who “intimidated us with his quizzing.”

In Blubber Bay the teacher was expected to clear the classroom for Saturday night dances held in the same building. Monday mornings meant mopping up the remains of the revelries.

In 1912 teachers earned \$70/month but paid room and board to local families or lived in the “teacherage” attached to, or near, the schoolhouse.

Although conditions were not ideal, Texada’s old one-room schools provided a decent education for a much simpler time.

