

Remember When?

"I knew I was going to be a teacher from the time I stepped into the classroom in grade one. I never thought of anything else," reminisces Elsie Gallant as she thinks back over her long career that began in a one room school house near Bathurst in 1945. By 1948, she was teaching in the one room Coverdale school that used to stand just past the Wesleyan Union Cemetery on Coverdale Road.

The school has vanished now, but at the time she had twenty-two students. Some were shy grade one students, and three were in grade eight tensely preparing for their high school entrance exams. If they didn't pass they had to remain behind, so grade eight was often one of the larger classes. One spring, she had her grade eight students meet her at the school every Saturday morning to study for the exams. "Everyone of them passed," she proudly reports.

The small community made discipline problems almost non-existent because if one of the students did something wrong, their parents were bound to hear about it, and "it was never repeated," she wryly points out. The students were generally eager to learn. By 1948, even the ones who planned to be farmers realized that farming was getting more complicated and they needed a good education to keep up.

Juggling eight different grades at once meant that she had to be very meticulous in her lesson plan. The day was divided into 15-minute units where she worked with one grade while the others researched a topic, did lessons, or read up on an upcoming lesson. Luckily she managed to follow her lesson plan 95% of the time, unlike teachers of today who may face more disruptions.

The day started with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer and a Bible reading, and there was always a Bible on her desk. "The students knew that when I picked up that Bible, it was time to start class."

On Fridays, they had their Red Cross Meetings which everyone looked forward to. The students learned all about running a meeting: how to take minutes, make and second a motion, and tally the votes. During the war, many of their projects focused on recycling, but later they cleaned up the school yard and planted flowers along the flag pole. "It doesn't hurt children to have training like that," she says. "It gave them a sense of purpose and taught them how to behave."

Her pupils would bring a serving of soup or stew

in a glass jar and Gallant would place them in a cauldron full of cold water that she would heat up on the wood stove all morning. By lunchtime she would be able to serve them their "hot lunch" before she headed home for her own dinner. "The students must have behaved, because the school was always immaculate when I got back," she says.

One year she lived too far away, so she ate at the school. This meant joining her students in their noon hour games. She can still remember the day she slipped running to first base and split her skirt all the way up the side seam. She pinned it together but for the rest of the afternoon she was terrified the school inspector would show up. She was a new teacher and they were inspected more often, but once she got to know him, she found out he was very nice and wasn't afraid of him anymore.

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The one room school houses had outhouses for sanitary facilities, but she preferred not to use it while the kids were around and this caused a few health problems in



This 1923 photo was taken at l'Academe Moncton.. We're guessing the boys were presenting a play.

A look back at education in Greater Moncton

by Kate Merlin



During the first half of the 20th century, one room school houses provided an educational setting for students in grades 1 to 8 during the first half of the twentieth century. Earlier school houses did not necessarily have outhouses. According to the report of a school inspector in 1854, one of the schools near the Free Meeting House had 50 children and no outhouse. He felt the children were being a mite disrespectful when they chose to use the local cemetery (still there) to answer the call of nature.

later years. At least they had an outhouse. A century earlier, according to the report of a school inspector in 1854, one of the schools near the Free Meeting House had 50 children and no outhouse. He felt the children were being a mite disrespectful when they chose to use the local cemetery (still there) to answer the call of nature.

At the time he found that only 1 in 12 children attended school, but the Free Schools Act of 1871 would soon change that. Schools were built at a rapid rate and Castle Manor which had been built as an old age home, was pressed into service as a school instead. There was also a school on Central Street which later became the site of Aberdeen school, Moncton's first high school. It burned down, but the building that replaced it has been given new life as the Aberdeen Cultural Centre.

For the Acadians, the Free Schools Act meant that the students had to use English only texts and write their exams in English. For this reason many Acadians preferred to send their children to private schools even though they still had to pay the school

tax. These church run schools contributed greatly to the Acadian Renaissance. The College Saint-Joseph in Memramcook later became the University of Moncton, one of the drivers of Moncton's economic engine.

Near the University of Moncton is the Notre-Dame convent where many Acadian girls including Antonine Maillet received their education. Gallant was an Anglo-phone Protestant but she went to a French convent boarding school to learn French. Her father could see how important the ability to speak it was going to be-



Above: Elsie Gallant's graduating class. Gallant was an Anglo-phone Protestant but she went to a French convent boarding school to learn French..

As Gallant moved from the one room school houses to the four room school houses, she began to specialize in teaching French to the older students. "They're gone now," she says as she describes the one room and four room school houses she taught at. However one "tiny" school has since grown to become Riverview Middle School with a population of 830 students. It was here that Gallant took part in an experiment in early French Immersion. Frank Bowser was the secretary of schools at the time and he worked with her principal to arrange her schedule so that she would have four 20-minute periods free a week.

During that time, she would run to the nearby elementary school (which now bears the name Frank L. Bowser) and speak nothing but French to one of the grade 2 classes while she was there. "It would absolutely blow your mind what those kids picked up in 15 minutes, 4 times a week," recalls Gallant.



The historical photos in this feature are courtesy of Centre d'études acadiennes, l'université de Moncton



Above: Grade 1, Lewisville, March 1949. Right: Above: The (first) Aberdeen High School, Moncton, New Brunswick.

Higher Education

Université de Moncton was originally founded as the Collège Saint-Thomas in 1854 by Abbé François-Xavier LaFrance, the parish priest in Memramcook. That Collège ran into financial difficulties, but a determine Father Camille Lefebvre re-founded it as the Collège Saint-Joseph in 1864. Many of the leaders of the Acadian Renaissance obtained their education at the Collège. In 1963, it became the Université de Moncton and moved to its present campus. The Acadian Museum founded in 1886 moved along with it and has found a permanent home the Clément-Cormier Pavillion where it has one of Champlain's journals on display.

Today the Université de Moncton has campuses in Edmunston and Shippigan and is the largest Canadian Francophone University outside of Quebec. The Moncton campus houses research centres on education, applied linguistics, energy conversion, and environmental sciences and has spawned a scientific business park.

Mount Allison University is probably the only university in Canada with a collection of silver spoons in it's library. The spoons belonged to the grandfather of Charles Frederick Allison who used them to entertain the local tax collector back in Ireland. When the tax collector saw the spoons, he promptly raised their taxes, and the family decided to emigrate to Canada.

Ireland's loss was Sackville's gain and in 1839 Charles Frederick Allison proposed to donate a site, building, and operating funds for 10 years so that the Wesleyan Methodists could build an institution of elementary and higher learning. Mount Allison Academy opened in 1843, and Ladies College, a branch institution for girls opened in 1854.

In 1862, Mount Allison College was given the power to grant university degrees and Grace Annie Lockhard became the first woman to receive a university degree in the British Empire when she received her BSc from Mount Allison in 1875.

Today Mount Allison is a well respected liberal arts and science university. The collection of silver spoons that started it all is proudly displayed in the Bell library.

