



The following from:

# A Grande Education:

One Hundred Schools in the  
County of Grande Prairie, 1910-1960  
Produced by South Peace Regional Archives

## MACHENRY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2851

MacHenry School District No. 2851 was authorized November 25, 1912. The name had been chosen from a list sent out by the Department of Education, just drawn out of a hat.

In 1913, a log structure was built by Ray Sears Sr. and B.T. Ryley on Emerson's land just east of Pine Creek, on the north side of the Emerson Trail. The Emerson Trail was broken by Morton Emerson for the purpose of hauling hay from the hay meadows at Kleskun Lake to his homestead on the NW 7-73-6-W6. The trail became the basis of a permanent road (Secondary Highway 672), which is still known as the Emerson Trail.

The first teacher at MacHenry School was Professor Higbee, husband of Dr. Annie Higbee, and on March 27, 1914, the first dance was held at the school. Ninety people attended.

The second school, also of log, was built a little further east on SW 16-73-6-W6, the homestead of Tom Smith. This school was sided inside and out, so it was difficult to tell that it was built of logs. In the yard was a flagpole. School opened

at 9:30 a.m. in the winter and closed at 3:30 p.m. because of early winter darkness. There were no school lights. A hot lunch and cocoa program was introduced by Emilie B. Payne (affectionately called Payne) who came to teach for six months and stayed six years. She was 19 when she came, and had 30 students from grades 1 to 9, few of whom spoke English. Some, at 15 years of age, were bigger than she was.

Student Janet Bellamy (Ophus) remembers, "Our day began when we heard the teacher ring the bell and we would line up outside to salute the flag as it was raised on the pole—I salute the flag, the emblem of my country, and to her I pledge my love and loyalty. Once inside, the teacher read from the Bible and we said the Lord's Prayer."

School was not all work. The MacHenry Christmas concert was the highlight of the winter with recitations, plays, dances, marching forms, songs, and Santa Claus giving out gifts. The students also participated in the Agricultural Fair and planted a garden on the east side of the

school with seeds provided by the government. With little summer care, however, the garden yielded mostly sunflowers.

These activities demanded the participation of the whole school, as did entries of choral speech or singing at the Grande Prairie Music Festival, Sports Days in Sexsmith or Grande Prairie, or simply a baseball game against a neighboring school. All ages working together was part of the value of a one-room school education.

The old MacHenry School house was sold in 1941 to Charley Ray who moved it 4 miles north to the LaGlacé-Buffalo Lakes Highway. He used it for a blacksmith shop and did custom work for about five years. A new frame school was built

To visit the MacHenry School site, take Secondary Highway 672 (Emerson Trail) west from Highway 2. At Rge Rd 64, a sign on the north-west corner of the intersection locates the three sites occupied by MacHenry School.

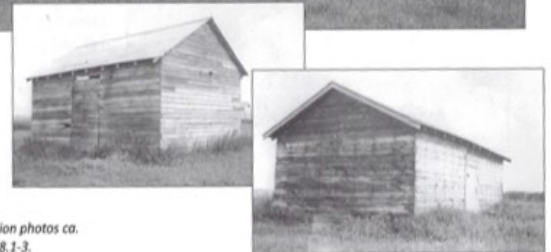
on the south-west corner of SE 17-73-6-W6, on the west side of Pine Creek, as there were more students coming from that direction. Mrs. Jennie B. Bellamy taught in the new MacHenry School from 1943-1952, at which time the school was closed and the students were bussed to Sexsmith.



MacHenry School students in 1915. Back row, L-R: Jim Tesar, Harry Hunsko, Ann Manyiak, Ileen Dawis, Miss Johnson, John Tesar, Vic Johnson, Fred Anderson. Second row: William Tesar, Isabel Davis, Naomi Davis, Bertha Bienderra, Ada Davis, Helen Tesar, Charlotte Bienderra, Walter Johnson, Peter Manyiak. Photo courtesy of Mary Kirkham, SPRA 2008.43.04.



MacHenry School District 2851 was established in 1912 for an area south-west of Sexsmith. The MacHenry School occupied three different sites. It was closed in 1943. GP School Division photos ca. 1952, SPRA 063.02.058.1-3.



Resources: *Buffalo Trails: Tales of the Pioneers*  
SPRA: MacHenry School Daily Registers, 1920; 929-1933  
School Division correspondence files, 1929-1957  
MacHenry School Reunion file  
GPPL: Isabel Campbell files, Schools—MacHenry, McHenry