



7 Somme School, 1928.



The following from:

A Grande Education:

One Hundred Schools in the
County of Grande Prairie, 1910-1960

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SOMME SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 3634

Somme School District 3634 was established March 15, 1918 for the Glen Leslie area, about 15 miles east of the Village of Grande Prairie. World War I was still raging at the time, and the district was named for the Battle of the Somme, fought in France in 1916.

Classes began in the Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church, a small log building which had been erected in 1915. Miss Marion Morrison was the teacher, and the students included young Alfred Wales who was enrolled at five years of age to make up the number required to engage a teacher.

Glen Leslie Church had been outfitted for the school with a painted wood blackboard, a teacher's desk, a small hand-bell, a few maps, a book cupboard with a few books, and a barrel stove. The church was a mile east of the Glen Leslie post office, and as teacher Bill Gutierrez recalled, "perched on a barren treeless knoll with not a flower or tree around it, nor even a fence to enclose the yard." Inside it was like hundreds of other tiny pioneer schools. "The log walls were chinked with plaster which was cracked and so tempting for youngsters to pick out. There were about a half dozen double desks for the students, and a teacher's desk with a small row of text books and a bell on it. At the back of the room was a tiny book cupboard, half full of



Top, Glen Leslie Presbyterian Church, built in 1915, was used as the school house for Somme School from 1918 to 1928. Bottom, the first class of students with teacher Marion Morrison on the steps of Glen Leslie Church. Photos on these two pages donated by Charles Wales, SPRA 2005.69.

some well read books, and even a few friendly mice. Beside the cupboard a small washstand held a basin and water pail. In the other back corner stood the barrel-like wood burning stove. The walls were decorated with a few maps."

Soon there were 15 students up to 15 years of age. After ten years of good student numbers, Somme School was built in 1928, 1/4 mile west of the church on the SE 1-72-4-W6. It

was much larger than the church and was built of lumber, with five large windows on the east side. The fenced yard was big enough for a ball diamond, swings and teeter-totter, a horse barn and outhouses.

Baseball was an important part of school life, and sometimes a whole afternoon was taken to walk to a neighbouring school (6-8 miles), play ball, and walk back home. The school was not used extensively for social functions since it was close to the Bezanson Hall where most community functions were held.

Somme School closed under consolidation in 1956, and students were bussed to the new Harry Balfour School in Grande Prairie. The buildings were sold and the school was renovated for a residence, but destroyed by a gas leak and fire before it could be lived in.

Two teachers at Somme School were Miss Ethel Turner (right) and Miss Keyho (left) who taught when the school re-opened after the flu epidemic.

Below, the buildings on the Somme School site ca. 1952, GP School Division photos, 063.02.36.1,2.

To visit the Somme School site, take Secondary Highway 670 east from Grande Prairie to Rge Rd 40. The school was where the second farmstead is now, on the north side of the road and about 1/4 mile west of the old church which was the first school.



Resources: *Smoky River to Grande Prairie*
SPRA: School Division correspondence files, 1930-1961
Wales family fonds
GPPL: Isabel Campbell files, Schools—Somme