



Yellowknife Education District No. 1

~ A History of Public Schooling ~

by Ryan Silke

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

September 2014





A message from YK1's Chairperson

It is a great pleasure, honour and privilege to be part of the celebration and recognition of education history in Yellowknife. Seventy-five years ago, Yellowknifers gathered in the Old Town to make plans for the first school. A board of trustees was identified, funds were raised and a log cabin was found to use for the school. A teacher was recruited and children in our city had the first opportunity for formal education.

Founded on gold, in 1939 Yellowknife was a fast growing community on the shores of Great Slave Lake. Miners, prospectors, trappers, merchants and other business people were setting up shop and some were starting families. Education of these children was an early priority of the new citizens of this remote new town.

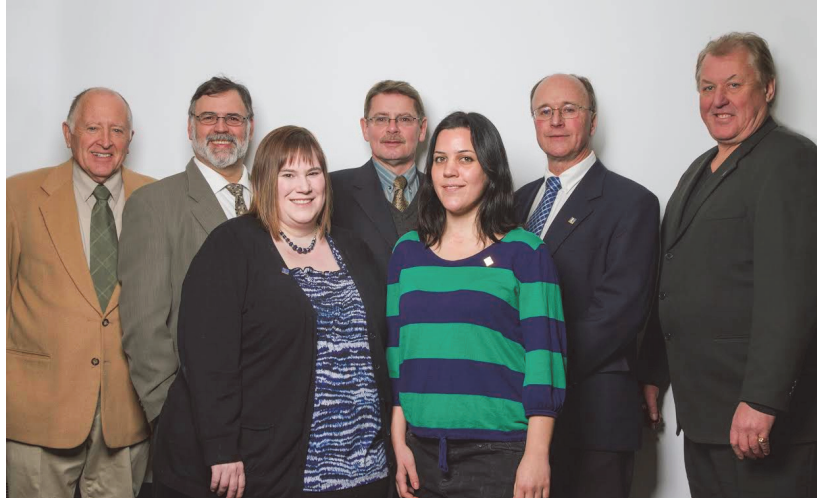
Times have changed. Yellowknife has grown and prospered. Education of our children continues to be a priority for our community.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, staff, parents and students, I welcome you to this short history of Yellowknife Education District Number 1. And many thanks to local historian, Ryan Silke, for his excellent research and writing to compile this historical account.

Come celebrate this milestone of education in Yellowknife and the countless children who have grown with us at YK1 over the past 75 years.

Sincerely,

John Stephenson
Chairperson, Yellowknife Education District No. 1



**Yellowknife Education District No. 1
Board of Trustees (2012-2015)**

John Stephenson, Chairperson
Heather Clarke, Vice Chairperson
Terry Brookes, Trustee
Jay Butler, Trustee
Mira Hall, Trustee
Blake Lyons, Trustee
Allan Shortt, Trustee

Superintendent of Education

Metro Huculak

75th Anniversary Working Group

John Stephenson, Chair
Jay Butler
Tina Drew
Bernie Giacobbo
Blake Lyons
Al McDonald
Tracy Turk

~ Introduction ~

Public schooling is more than a system for educating students. It creates a model of working society and encourages youth to develop into caring and responsible community citizens. For 75 years, Yellowknife Education District No. 1 has provided this city with a platform for quality education and community connections and, as we celebrate this pivotal anniversary, we reflect on the humble beginnings of public education in the Northwest Territories.

Located in the heart of the city, Yellowknife Education District No.1 is the NWT's premiere public education district and houses its longest serving school board. The seeds of our schools take us back to the gold rush when Yellowknife was a bustling boomtown full of prospectors, trappers, miners, merchants, and their families. In the summer of 1938 there were about 1,000 non-aboriginal people in the district and most were single miners. At the gold mines on the outskirts of town and within the Yellowknife settlement itself there were over a dozen families with young children.

In the early 20th century, when fur trading was the most important industry in the north, education was dominated by a network of church-run mission schools along the Mackenzie River. Around these posts were clusters of aboriginal dwellings and seasonal camps and from these points of commerce and trade our modern communities have arisen. Yellowknife, on the other hand, was settled at a later stage in the political evolution of the north. The missions and traders held less influence - government agents advocating mineral development asserted the most authority.

Old Town Yellowknife on the waterfront boasted a variety of amenities: clothing stores, hotels, pool hall, barbers, cafes, and a theatre, but as a pioneer settlement, it lacked organized community services. It was a young town with most of its residents literally “fresh off the boat” (Yellowknife being serviced by water traffic on Great Slave Lake), but already they considered this community to be more than a frontier mining camp. They wanted it to be a real town.

What did it take to be a ‘real’ town? Yellowknifer’s had many ideas and there was no shortage of dissatisfaction on how things were being managed. Consider that in 1937-1938, a town rose from the rocks with no planning - because as typically happens during a mining rush, trade and commerce came before government. Although the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had arrived at an early stage, their duties were strictly to oversee law and order, and act as government agents for the recording of mineral claims. Log cabins and buildings were erected in the absence of land tenure with no thought of sanitation, so clean water and property rights were some of the first issues raised by the settlers. Also important were liquor and mining laws, roads, public toilets, community government, and, last but certainly not least, public education.

~ Provisional Beginnings ~

“One of the first necessities of any organized community is a good school”, wrote *The Prospector* newspaper in the summer of 1938. “This situation requires immediate attention. We believe it worthy of the most careful consideration of every resident of Yellowknife.” ¹

Rallying to the call of civic action, a group of citizens convened at Vic Ingraham’s hotel in November 1938, where a provisional school board was organized with four members. A government grant and public subscriptions quickly raised over \$1,000 which was enough to set the wheels in motion. ²



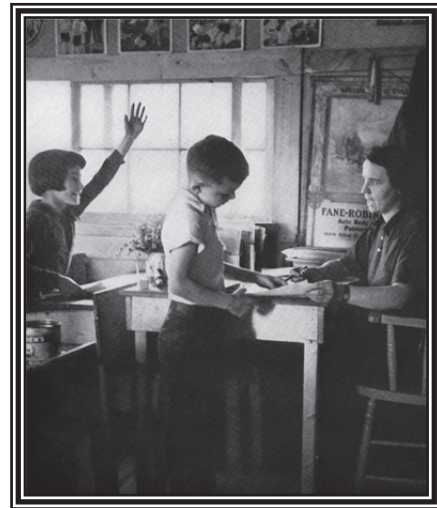
Mildred Hall with students, 1939.
(NWT Archives/Porritt/N-1987-016:0115)

The first classes were held informally over the dark winter months of 1938/1939. Vera Lane donated use of her home and D.A. Davies offered his time as a volunteer teacher. The money that was raised helped secure a more suitable school house in a tiny log cabin rented from a mining company located behind Weaver & Devore along Pilots Lane in Old Town. Twenty

pupils of varying ages had enrolled at the start of classes on January 30, 1939.³

Mildred Hall was an early choice for school teacher. She called Fort Fitzgerald on the Slave River home when in 1938 the idea of a school in the north first circulated. Hall immediately expressed an interest and was eagerly awaiting word. As provisions were not made until November, and the freezeup period was advancing, circumstances had prevented Ms. Hall's arrival prior to the start of classes in January 1939.

It is not certain just what arrangements were made to provide compensation to Mr. Davies, and his role as 'first' teacher is scantily acknowledged in the historical record. As the goal was for the public school to operate based on Alberta curriculum standards, Mr. Davies, who was not an accredited teacher, probably lacked those requirements. He was evidently always the substitute choice, for Davies was graciously relieved on February 28, 1939 as Ms. Hall arrived to look after the flock of nubile minds in a full-time capacity. Her influence and commitment to the growth of the school program has no doubt led to her legacy as Yellowknife's first true teacher.⁴



Mildred Hall and students, 1939
(from Finnie's *Canada Moves North*)

That first little school was cramped quarters. The tiny 16 x 16 log cabin could not necessarily fit all 20 or so students in one sitting, so it was customary to split the groups into morning and afternoon shifts. In Mildred Hall's own words, the first month on the job was utter chaos.

Eighteen pupils had to be crammed into a sixteen foot square log building; eighteen pupils whose ages ranged from six to fifteen, half of whom were juniors, who must be kept occupied despite a lack of desk materials, and the remainder seniors, most of whom, having been out of school for a year or two, had to be brought forward to their grades ... without textbooks. Discipline, under such conditions, was almost unattainable. And, in our cramped quarters, adequate heat

meant no ventilation and proper ventilation, with the thermometer registering from 40 to 50 below, meant shivering in bitter cold. ... But lengthening days brought warm sunlight and after the belated arrival of books and equipment and with the growth of mutual liking between myself and the children, things looked brighter.⁵

Contrary to popular stories, Ms. Hall did not live in this tiny cabin but resided in more appropriate accommodations available in town. But the stories about inebriated miners curiously peeking in through windows are grounded in truth, since the path leading by the school was a major thoroughfare for partygoers stumbling along the trails that connected to the seedy parts of Old Town.

“Wild titters, barely suppressed, would draw my attention to the passing of some individual or group who had patently been making stout attempts to quench heavy thirsts. Occasionally some questing stranger would peer in alcoholic amaze through the window, to the complete disruption of order. Once two illuminated miners appeared in the doorway and wanted to buy a drink.”

Yellowknife Provisional School
Board Sponsors
GRAND SWEEPSTAKE
On the arrival at the Settlement
of Yellowknife of the first com-
mercial plane from Edmonton or
Peace River after break-up.

Planes of M.A.S., C.A.L. or P.R.A.
are eligible.

\$1.00 entitles you to draw one ticket

A total of 352 \$1.00 tickets have
been printed each indicating a 15 minute
period between the hours, 8 am to 10 pm
on one of the days of the week, irrespectiv
of dates.

The lucky winner will receive a cash
prize of \$100.00, and in the event of 300
or more tickets being sold a cash prize of
\$50.00 will be given on the same basis for
the arrival of the second plane.

The balance of the funds will go th
the Yellowknife Provisional School board.

The board came up with creative
ways to raise money, including a
sweepstake draw to guess the day
and time that the first float plane
would land during breakup 1939.
(The Prospector, April 22, 1939)

Graduation day 1939 was a celebration worthy of note for the local newspaper. That first semester of school ended in June 1939 and saw the completion of grade classes for twelve children of the Yellowknife district. An afternoon of sports and picnicking was followed by a ceremonial awarding of a new silver dollar to each graduated pupil, donated by the Daughter's of the Midnight Sun.⁶

The provisional organization kept a tight budget on the whole affair. Leading the group was the local Bank of Commerce manager, D.T. Munroe, who was later lauded for his contributions to the school effort. “He is a great financial wizard of our age,” said fellow board member Bill Williams, “he actually ran

a school district without taxation!” Indeed, it was the kind contributions of Yellowknifer's that made that first three months of school a reality.⁷

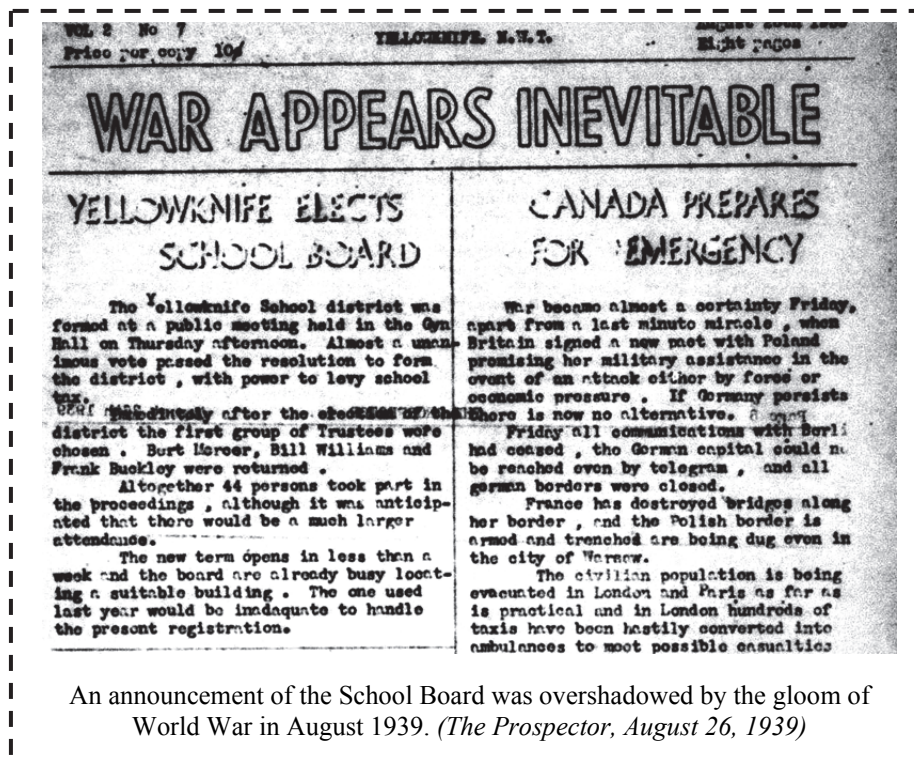
~ The Creation of a School Board ~

Through trial and maybe some error, the provisional school board was ready to make it official and hand the reigns over to a proper organization. On August 24, 1939, the first meeting of the Yellowknife School District No. 1^{*} was held, and three members were elected to serve and be responsible for erecting a permanent school – Bert Mercer, who ran the Yellowknife Drug Store, Bill Williams, and Frank Buckley.⁸ It was the first time that Yellowknifers had sat down together to perform a democratic act, and the school board was the first elected body of its type in the Northwest Territories. It even predated the local town trustee government that was organized four months later, but then consider that the trustees did not become a fully-elected municipal council until 1953!

Yellowknife School District No. 1 was formally established on October 1, 1939 under Section 33 of the NWT School Ordinance. The first task of the school board was to make an assessment of property in Yellowknife and to set up mill rates so that property owners could be taxed in order to provide services. The first court of revision was held on November 3, 1939, and a tax collector was appointed. The mill rate was six mills.⁹

Mildred Hall was again appointed as teacher at a salary of \$100 per month, and classes began in the log school house on September 5, 1939, with 21 pupils enrolled.¹⁰ Ms. Hall surveyed the children who might be expected to attend so that a suitable building could be acquired. It was clear that the funding required to design, construct, and operate a fully functional school was not yet practical, but the old log cabin just couldn't do an adequate job. A slightly more spacious bunkhouse formerly used by Mining Corporation of Canada was then rented, large enough to build a partition down the center. It was in this building that Mildred Hall both lived and taught, but the 1939/1940 school term was her last as Yellowknife teacher (but not her last association with education as she would later serve on the school board).¹¹ In September 1940, Hazel Midgley was hired, and she too lived and taught in meager accommodations that soon outgrew its purpose.

^{*} It was called Yellowknife School District No. 1 until 1976 when it became Yellowknife Education District No. 1.



By now, the School Board was organized to a point where action to build a stand-alone school was already well in progress. In February 1940, an important meeting was held to discuss financing a building and selecting a site. Representatives of the Con and Negus Mines made a strong presentation in support of a location that was convenient for both the Yellowknife settlement and the gold mining camps. Since the start of the school organization, the gold mines had been unable to participate because of the great inconvenience to send pupils into town. Betty Giegerich, the wife of Con's mine manager, set up a small classroom in the mine's recreation hall complete with blackboards and study desks. About fifteen children from Con and Negus attended classes, often to the chagrin of the workers coming off graveyard shift who held out hope for a break in the studies so they could shoot a game of billiards.¹²

A permanent school site was chosen half way between the mines and town. The mines were so enthusiastic that Con Mine offered to provide a capital loan to the school board. Government rejected this proposal as they preferred donations, so Con added \$1500 and Negus \$1000 to the coffers, while the government nearly matched that at \$2000. Furnishings for the

classrooms were generously donated by local businesses.¹³

A tender for a two-room school was awarded to Bobby Porritt of Fort Resolution Lumber Company at a budget of \$4500. Hazel Midgley and Christine May were engaged as teachers. The formal opening of this third school took place on Monday, November 18, 1940, at 4:00pm. There were 45 pupils. It was the first public school to be built from the ground up in the NWT, and a major accomplishment for the small board and the civic-minded gold camp.¹⁴

~ Schooling in the Draw ~

The new school was within a draw that today (2014) houses the City's water supply pumphouse and reservoir along Yellowknife Bay. It was from this school that the name School Draw Avenue originates. Situated halfway between town and the mining camps, the goal was to make the school accessible for all. In reality, the location was equally inconvenient for everyone! At first there was no road connecting the school to the community. Carl Jensen, a local taxi operator, was awarded a contract to 'bus' children at a rate of \$4.00 per day.¹⁵ His bus was a sedan car, and the road was over the ice of the Bay. Dolly Mercredi, a Metis dog musher that lived on Mosher Island and whose son also attended class, would pick up kids on their daily trek across the packed snow. Many students would walk (or even skate) across the ice or, in the summer, along the rocky lakeshore, until later when a rough road was cleared between Con Mine and Yellowknife via Tin Can Hill, eliminating the requirement for children to risk the "treacherous goat-track on top of the rock".¹⁶

Hazel Midgley was a teacher from 1940 to 1944 and was always vigilant about the safety of the children as they left at the end of the day:

"Some of the children lived a long distance from school. We encouraged them to return home in groups. The older children were very responsible, helping the younger ones. Every child had to be inspected in cold weather, as forgotten mitts and scarves could be serious."¹⁷



The school in the draw along the shores of Yellowknife Bay, used 1940-1947. Army hut adjacent was the teacher's residence. (*NWT Archives/Busse/N-1979-052:4808*)

The new school was a vast improvement over the original log school, especially in terms of space. It had two classrooms, two cloakrooms, and a storage room. But the facility in the School Draw had its own share of problems. The classes were separated by a sliding partition that did little to provide a sound barrier between. It was infamous for being a cold building and students and teachers customarily wore parkas while in class. Gas lamps provided light and the toilet was an outhouse in the yard, which Hazel Midgley described as “a disaster”, but this could not diminish school spirit nor the eagerness of the pupils to learn.

“Faced with about 30 students, (ranging in age from 5 to 15), eight grades and very few books, kept me very busy. Some of the children had brought books from ‘outside’ which they graciously shared. We made good use of the blackboards but seat work was a real problem. I usually spent several hours every night writing out exercises. Somehow I must have succeeded in keeping them busy, as I cannot recall any discipline problems. The older children were exceptional – offering to help the younger children with their reading and arithmetic.”

The school was maintained by a caretaker who did his best to ensure that the building was warm for the children. Pat Tefler was the daughter of a Con Mine engineer and attended classes through some uncomfortable moments:

“A memorable day each school year was when the rims of the outdoor toilet seats were removed by the janitor, brought into the school basement, washed with ammonia then dried. Bless the janitor, he must have been on our side, for this procedure always took place in the morning. As we sat at our desks puzzling over a math problem, we would slowly become aware of an unsavory odor filtering up through the floor grates. This pungent smell seeped into every corner and increased in strength until we began to hold our breath and noses. Then, the teacher would tell us to put our books away, get our outdoor clothes on and go home. School was closed for the rest of the day.”¹⁸

Joe Malmsten’s dad worked at Negus Mine and the family lived in a small house not too far from the school. He remembers a small school of about 50 students lit by gas lanterns, and the outdoor recess activities:

“The schoolyard was small, and in the gully between two high rock hills we played scrub baseball. ... In the winter, we had the usual snowman and snowball fights, plus sliding down the snow covered hills on everything from tin can and cardboard to regular sleighs. A good part of the slide took place on the seat of our pants. I look back now and have sympathy for those mothers who made those clothes wearable for the next day, only to have to do it all over again that evening.

“Some of the winters were very cold. The school building had a wood-fired furnace and seemed to smoke a lot of the time. With the walls not too well insulated, it was sometimes rather cool, especially in the years of 1946 to 1947 when it dropped to well over 60 below zero. We had, at times, to wear heavy clothing at our desks. There was a thermometer on the classroom wall and when the conditions were really bad, the teachers would sometimes send us home for the rest of the day. We soon wised to this, and put snow under the thermometer ball to make the temperature drop, knowing that this was one of the first things the teacher would check upon entering the classroom in the morning. One day, our timing was a little off and she walked in before we could remove the snow. She spotted the remains running down the wall, so after that we spent some rather cool days in class.”¹⁹

During the war years, the population of Yellowknife decreased dramatically when many of its citizens left the country to fight overseas. This hurt, but did not kill, the community. The big gold mines continued to operate although at a scaled back rate of production, so there were still many families in the district. That a demand for education lingered is clear from a 1942 decision to expand the school by adding a third classroom.

By now, Yellowknife was connected to hydroelectric power from Con Mine's Bluefish Lake hydro dam and the school was hooked into the small grid. The Board was now signing checks to pay a monthly utility bill, and to keep consumption at a minimum, school staff were told to cut down on the size of light bulbs to prevent a recurrence of the April 1942 bill – twenty-one dollars, or nearly \$300 in today's dollars.²⁰

Christine May taught from 1940 to 1945 and was senior teacher, a position that was akin to principal. She wrote about Christmas concert recitals, student fundraisers so that the school could purchase a piano, outdoor activities, and non-stop socializing during the afterhours of teaching. An undeniable sense of community pride was attached to the running of the school, even for the young pupils, a memory that stuck with Mrs. May forty years later:

“The children from Negus Village, Con Village, Town and all areas in between attended the school. There was a good feeling of unity and they were proud of ‘our’ Yellowknife school. Many of these children had spent all of their lives in the north ... Environment and circumstances made them mature beyond their years and thus they were better able to accept responsibilities. They were untouched by the extreme behaviour problems found in outside schools. However, new clothing fads and new songs were followed and enjoyed. They knew the code of the North: fairness and friendship to all.”²¹

In 1944, the school provided Grades 1 to 7 on the Alberta program and made extensive use of Alberta Correspondence Courses for its senior pupils who excelled in academic performance. There were 50 pupils enrolled in classes. At that time, the School Board was considering extending its offerings to Grade 11. The cost to run this school was minimal, with a yearly budget of \$7500. The government provided a grant of \$1500 with the bulk of the revenue secured through Yellowknife property taxes.²²

A new gold boom surged through the district in 1944-1945 and, bolstered by the end of the war, Yellowknife's population and subsequent demand for services expanded. In 1945, the school introduced Grades 10, 11, and 12 by renovating the building to allow a fourth classroom. The area of the school district was expanded from a 3.5 mile to a 15 mile radius from town center, as new mining developments were anticipated from which tax revenues

could be collected. New teachers were hired and Mr. F. Foley was appointed principal in 1945. The next year, a hut was built next to the school as a teacher accommodation, and another was made available for a primary classroom in town. At the start of classes on September 3, 1946, there were over 130 pupils enrolled. Teachers and infrastructure were stretched thin. Something had to be done! ²³

Mildred Young arrived in Yellowknife in the fall of 1947 to teach the final months in the old facility, and was shocked beyond belief at what awaited her in the School Draw.

“At my first view of these facilities my heart sank. The school was a tarpaper shack perched on an outcropping of rock overlooking the bay. Next to it was another tarpaper shack with wooden steps leading up to a door on the side which constituted the teachers’ quarters. In front stood an enormous toilet on stilts for the use of the school children, as it was not possible to dig a hole down into the rock, and of course there was no plumbing anywhere except at some of the mines. Facilities for the teachers was a bucket set in a toilet can in a tiny room at one end of the building with a vent going out through the roof. Periodically the bucket was emptied by the ‘Honey Truck’ that came around to dispose of human waste in some way that I did not want to know about.

“Each of us had a classroom in the rambling makeshift of a school, which was somehow fastened to the rocks that rolled off in all directions from the water’s edge of town. The building was one enormous fire trap and I used to mentally calculate just how I would get the children out the windows onto the rocks in case of fire, especially since various woolly dogs used to join the children and roll their vast bulks out in the hallway, conveniently blocking the single entrance. From the windows at one end of my classroom it would have been possible to reach the rocks below. The other classrooms were not so well placed as they sat high in the air above the rocks on their side of the building.” ²⁴

The good news for Mildred and her fellow staff was that conditions for teaching were about to undergo a pivotal improvement. In 1946 and 1947, development of a new townsite for Yellowknife was well underway, and surveying of a flat sandy plain adjacent Frame Lake revealed a space capable of supporting hundreds of new lots and functional water and sewer service. A site was quickly reserved for a modern school building at the corner of Franklin Avenue and 53rd street (the present-day School District offices) and construction began. The government again contributed

substantial capital towards the construction of the new school and, even when the project went over budget by 35%, the territorial administration stepped in and paid the balance.

~ Yellowknife Public School ~

The new Public School opened in December 1947 and contained seven classrooms, offices, community rooms, and offered a Grade 1 to 12 education in the most modern facilities available. A brand new apartment was built for Mildred Young and the four other teachers while Bill Hayhurst, the new principal, was given his own house. Mildred Young taught here until she left Yellowknife in 1950. She remembers a beautiful building with hardwood floors and one of the first public facilities with running water.

“The School Board had enough foresight to install showers for the children and when the water was eventually turned on, the classes took turns showering once a week, an enormous convenience for parents who had to buy water by the barrel and heat it on the stove.”²⁵

The board was now functioning with five elected members and a secretary-treasurer staffed by local accountant Max King. In 1950, this school had enrolled 182 pupils (38 being high school age) and as the population of school-age children was increasing rapidly, plans were made to add more classrooms and services and improve the quality of education.²⁶

The post-war gold boom brought many young adults to the north. In 1947, the Yellowknife population was about 2,000 people, with nearly everyone between the ages of 20 and 45. Elderly people, outside of the aboriginal population, were rare. The young adults produced children of elementary school age. Only a handful were of high school level, and for those few, the idea of high wages staking mineral claims or drilling for gold offered more reward than sitting in a classroom.

Soon, the exploration boom passed and Yellowknife geared into the serious business of industrial mining while also transitioning into an administrative and business center. Mature families made a stake in the

community and a variety of children across the grade spectrum were entering the school system.

The success of the Yellowknife School did not go unnoticed in government circles. The Territorial Administration in Ottawa was thoroughly impressed by the idea of non-denominational schools and pushed forward this preference when planning new schools in the Northwest Territories. The end of the church mission-run schools was in sight, and the Federal Government, with its mandate to provide aboriginal people with education, was preparing to take over. Northern affairs took on a new



The new Public School. (NWT Archives/Busse/N-1979-052:4060)

direction in 1953 with the formation of the Northern Affairs and National Resources department under the new Liberal prime minister. N.A.N.R solidified a government vision for education in the NWT, carving out an administration and curriculum where none existed before.

Yellowknife was unique in the territory as having the sole non-denominational public school board. Its school building, erected in 1947, was a modern design but in 1950 it lacked important vocational facilities - shop class, a room for teaching home economics, even a basic gymnasium or school library. The School Board was well aware of those deficiencies. However, money to inject into capital projects was not available in the board's bank roll. It was at this stage that a solid relationship between the School Board and the territorial administration was forged.

The government commissioned several studies of the school system in the NWT and paid particular attention to the success of the public school board in Yellowknife. In the 1950's, debate raged over the future of church-run schools and, as the government was leaning away from the church and

taking education matters into their own hands, throwing more support behind the school board in Yellowknife was a logical step forward. One study recommended working with the public school board to provide a new basis for financing through the administration of a small per capita grant. This grant would encompass a percentage of approved expenditures for current costs, a percentage of approved capital expenditures, and the total costs for approved equipment required for general shop, home economics, and commercial classes.²⁷

As a result of these discussions, the Yellowknife Public School was expanded through government assistance in 1952 allowing for an addition of a gymnasium, auditorium, and new classrooms capable of housing 225 pupils.²⁸ A school operating grant was negotiated wherein the government would help pay the direct operating costs of the school based on the previous year's attendance. This, together with the taxation obtained through the municipality of Yellowknife, was more than enough to keep the school on solid financial footing.

At this juncture, it is also important to note the formation of a new school board in the Yellowknife district, a second public board created at the request of the Catholic residents of the community. It was known as the Separate School District No. 2 and opened its school in Yellowknife in September 1953 with 94 pupils, 70 of whom that transferred over from the existing school district.²⁹

~ Years of Expansion ~

1950s Yellowknife was quickly evolving into a modern city: paved roads, water and sewer works, telephones, reliable hydro power, a variety of churches, public radio station, newspaper, social clubs, government offices, recreation complex, golf course, fire department, and a fully-elected municipal council with chambers in a real town hall. It was a family-oriented town of permanence, a vast improvement over a place simply to accumulate wealth before returning to 'civilization'. Yellowknife was now a part of that civilization.

To the children, their schools helped solidify that sense of home. The public school was located in the heart of the downtown core. People still walked most places and the children strolled to and from school along wide paths carved through the snow across vacant lots and back alleys. It was a multicultural place, reflective of immigration incentives to bring new workers to Canada. Germans, Italians, Hungarians...all found stable work at the gold mines of Yellowknife and were soon joined by their families, secure in the knowledge that quality schooling would be provided for their children. Afterall, the District was considered one of the best in the Alberta curriculum.

It was always intended that the school would be a social and recreational center of Yellowknife. It provided the public with a great venue for extra-curricular activities and a place to meet and greet. It was common in the evenings to see the classrooms overflowing with people attending a prospecting course, an association or church meeting, a ladies handicraft group, and in the spacious basement, a boxing class, and weekly Boy Scout or Girl Guide functions.

In the hours after the students had left for the day, teachers and parents would reunite during Yellowknife Home and School Association meetings, a vital and active group that was formed in 1950 to promote cooperation between teachers, parents, and the school board. Their mandate went further: to study problems of the school and management as they affect the children, create an informed public opinion, to study and promote all measures of the school board, and obtain the largest possible return to the community from the school. Their monthly meetings were social occasions where they planned school functions and organized guest speakers and films on important educational topics. The meetings became a competitive event between the parents of each class – bragging rights shown by the display of banners hung in the classrooms.

Education did not end with the ringing of the school bells. Teachers Norma Dunsmore and Wyn Jackson opened their classrooms to the large contingent of post-war Italian, German, and eastern European immigrant miners off shift from Con and Giant Mines. Thanks to the teachers, these men learned basic English so they could safely communicate while working

in the depths of the gold mines. Perhaps the only one who was annoyed about the constant use of the school was the janitor, Ted Matijon, who once made a formal complaint, and asked for a night off and a raise in pay. The Board struck a compromise by giving the janitor a 45-gallon barrel of heating fuel in lieu of overtime pay!³⁰

Dave Lovell's father was a diamond driller with Boyles Brothers and arrived in 1956. He lived a mere block away from the school and, as his father was an active hockey player, most of his childhood was spent going from home to school to the arena, all within sight of each other.

"During the 1950's the Public Library, staffed by volunteers, operated out of a basement room in the school. I attended Cubs which was held weekly in the Boy's Basement. Later a second pack was formed and its meetings were held at the same time in the Girl's Basement. The equipment was kept in a big gray crate-like box which was stored in the Boy's Basement. ...

"We had the best playground in Canada as we were allowed the run of the 'School Rocks'. We played 'Guns' in the spring and fall, and during winter we played a king-of-the-castle type game which we called 'fight for the rock'. I don't ever recall anyone being seriously or even slightly hurt, and it was seen as almost a punishment when we were made to stay indoors and play in the school basements during really cold weather. In those days almost everyone wore mukluks instead of boots or shoes to school and the classroom always smelled of wet smoked leather." ³¹

With roads now built to the outlying mining camps, it was much easier for children who lived at Con or Giant mines to make their way to school. There were very few private cars in Yellowknife until the 1950s, thus the establishment of a bus service was a necessity in New Town. Frame & Perkins Limited was awarded the school bus contract in 1947. The bus trip to Con Mine was quick and easy.

For the kids who lived at Giant Mine, the trip into town was akin to a great



NWT High School Curling Champs, 1955. Dave Searle, Wayne Searle, Jed Dagenais, Bill Knutsen. The team placed fourth in the Alberta finals.

adventure. The original road to Giant was narrow, curved around rock outcrops, and had one major obstacle at the ravine at Jackfish Lake. Here, when driving from Giant to Town, the road made a quick 90 degree turn right after a steep incline up from Jackfish Lake. In winter conditions, it was a treacherous climb. Frank Warren, the F&P bus driver, would often get stuck or plunge into the ditch and a tractor would need to be called to pull them up. It was frustrating for the drivers but a great thrill for the children! Few kids ever misbehaved twice on the bus because the drivers were not afraid to kick them off and it was a long lonely walk back home.

Frame & Perkins only had a limited number of buses available and the same vehicles were often used for public and pupil transit depending on the day's schedule. It was for this reason that F&P, even in the 1970s, was one of the only bus lines in the country that was not required to conform to the standard orange school bus. Under special arrangements, the buses retained their iconic blue and white palette.³²

The schools in Yellowknife expanded in the late 1950's but not under the guidance of the public school board. It was the Federal Government calling the shots when it came time to construct a high school facility for the Northwest Territories – and Yellowknife was chosen as the location. Outside of Yellowknife, the Federal Government had responsibility for education due to their commitment to aboriginal peoples. Construction began on a composite high school with a vocational training mandate and a dormitory so that students from across the north could attend. Opened in September 1958, Sir John Franklin High School absorbed the Grade 10, 11, and 12 students from the Yellowknife School District No. 1. It had a focus of industrial training so that students could find work in the trades and resource sectors. The dormitory, Akaitcho Hall, operated from 1958 to 1994 and was considered one of the best-administered hostels in the north.

Teachers were engaged from southern points with a focus on hiring well-qualified individuals with degrees as well as teaching certificates. Salaries were excellent, an important prerequisite if the Board hoped to attract people north. In truth, Yellowknife was a bustling community and had all the amenities and services to attract a stable and committed staff. Ready accommodation in Board owned housing was also an attractive proposition

for new recruits. As an isolated mining camp, women were in short supply and enjoyed an active social life, whether they asked for one or not. One teacher said their apartment was akin to a nightclub where a constant stream of taxicabs brought visitors, drink, and cheer. The holiday season was especially so, because teachers typically did not fly out for Christmas break.

“One thing in the early 50s, the community was certainly friendly towards us, the newcomers and as an example of that most of us had five or six invitations to Christmas dinner and even the day before people were phoning and asking if all the teachers were being taken care of for Christmas.”³³

The main residence was Yellowknife Apartments, owned by Denis O’Callaghan. Rent was subsidized by the School Board who paid rent to O’Callaghan, a local market gardener and grocer, until 1966 when the Board purchased the property. The eight-plex suites were convenient for the teachers, living a minute’s walk from work on 53rd Street. It quickly outgrew the demands of staff and was augmented in 1972 with Nordic Arms apartment, located on Franklin Avenue at the site of the former principal and staff housing. The School Board remained in the business of property management until the 1980s when it sold its holdings and eliminated housing subsidies. This was, perhaps, a reflection of a growing trend in the community for residents to purchase land and build their own homes.



Teaching in the new Public School, 1950s.
(George Hunter photo)

Yellowknife School District No. 1 was administered by a small elected board consisting of seven trustees (as of 1964). Meetings were run by a nominated chairman and finances controlled by a secretary-treasurer. Monthly meetings supplemented with special ratepayer meetings were held at the school. The principal was the senior paid staff and reported directly to the board. As new principals were hired at the additional schools, a position

for regional superintendent of education was created in 1973 – principals reported to the superintendent and the superintendent reported to the board. The Board was still a small organization, and trustees and staff were a tightly knit group. Both worked together for the betterment of the facilities without overstepping authorities. Trustees were not afraid to jump head first into projects even if it meant getting their hands dirty – literally. Bill Stalker, a chairman of the board in the 1960s, was a mechanical foreman at Giant Mine. When the school roof sprung a leak, he did not hesitate to bring in men and supplies to get the job done, all during their free time.³⁴

Between 1960 and 1970, school enrollment doubled as the population grew resulting in the opening of Mildred Hall Elementary school in 1965-1966 and subsequent expansion in 1971.³⁵ The original Public School was converted to a Grades 7 to 9 junior high school and later renamed after William McDonald a local geologist and naturalist.* In 1973, there were over 1,400 pupils attending the three schools plus another 167 enrolled in the Catholic system. It was estimated that the student population made up 22% of the city's population. There were 120 children in the kindergarten program alone. Mildred Hall operated a unique kindergarten classroom in the shape of a huge Teepee, splitting the classes into morning and afternoon shifts with two teachers on staff.³⁶

On April 1, 1969, responsibility for education in the Northwest Territories was devolved from the Federal to the Territorial Government with the aim of bringing those responsible for education closer to the people concerned.³⁷ The change in management had certain repercussions for the school board – the arrival of new government staff and their families meant increased enrollment in the schools. Meanwhile the territorial Department of Education instituted rules and regulations and began to influence decisions regarding selection of staff and evaluations. A new Education Act in 1976 was passed and, as a result, the name of the board was changed to Yellowknife Education District No. 1.

* These schools were nameless until 1974 when Mildred Hall and William McDonald were selected as names for the elementary and middle schools respectively. J.H. Sissons was chosen as the name for the new elementary school then under construction.

~ Gardens and Graphics ~

The schools were instrumental in the creation of a unique recognition of the Canada's 100th birthday in 1967 on the main thoroughfare of town. Leading the charge was Bill Holden, school maintenance superintendent (1961-1977), and his wife Rollie. One day an idea struck Bill:

"I said to Rollie one morning, you know, we don't have much dirt up here. What do you think about starting a garden for Centennial year, and getting people from all over Canada to send us some of their dirt?"

Bill Holden's idea had some initial detractors but the idea caught on, and soon crates of dirt were showing up at the local post office to the bewilderment of the postmaster. Bob Jenkin's shop class were already building flower boxes and planting flowers on Franklin Avenue in front of Mildred Hall School, when a call came down from official government channels in Ottawa. It was a 'cease and desist' order from the Department of Agriculture, concerned about the massive importing of southern soils into the north and the threat for invasive and harmful bugs and bacteria.

It was a reasonable concern, and after some thought Bill and Rollie Holden proposed sterilizing the soil. But how does one sterilize thousands of pounds of dirt? In their home oven, a few pounds of soil at a time! It wrecked havoc in Rollie's kitchen, and eventually Bill acquired an industrial oven and set it up in the school's boiler room.



The Centennial Garden in front of Mildred Hall elementary.
(Gerry Reiman photo)

Within a week 5,000 pounds of soil were sterilized to the satisfaction of the bureaucrats. The Centennial Garden was launched with the raising of a Canadian Flag in the summer of 1967. The garden was outlined with flags of all provinces and territories and within the grassy field was the centennial

symbols and '1867 – 1967' written into the field with colourful flowers. During the NWT Centennial three years later, the school completed the finishing touches on the garden by planting the shape of a small polar bear and '70'.³⁸

The school staff and children made a concerted effort over the years to maintain the garden as a front piece to Yellowknife's main street and although it became less maintained and was eventually re-landscaped, there are many fond memories of that flower garden for the children who worked on it.

Another achievement of student-staff coordination was the publication of the Public School's first ever yearbook in 1967. Robert Jenkins, industrial arts teacher from 1966-1972, is credited for sparking interest among his students and renovated part of the school shop into a graphic arts section. It just so happened that Ted Horton, publisher of the local newspaper, was disposing of his old printing presses and type-setting machinery. Bill Braden was a student in the classes:

When Bob Jenkins was the industrial arts teacher at the junior high school, he also took over Ted's old Linotype machine, and an enormous flatbed printing press. Peter Jenkins, Bob's son, and I actually rebuilt the linotype machine one summer in junior high school. Even got it running, squirting hot lead all over the place, but it ran! Bob got the old press going too, as part of his graphic arts shop. I think the school eventually scrapped them both, as offset printing had long taken over.³⁹

Jenkins had a love for all things antique. The old lead-cast linotype and presses may have seen better days but it was just what he needed to teach students the basics of commercial printing. One of their first projects was to create business cards. Then, using more modern printers, a group of students started work on a yearbook. The book was of simple design, a true locally produced endeavor. It featured ads from business sponsors, stories from students, sport highlights, and reports from various school activities including awards, safety patrol, cheerleaders, monitors, and the foster child program. A centerpiece of the book was the Centennial Debate held at the school, wherein the Public and Catholic teams debated whether the NWT was ready for self government. Arguing in favour of self-government, the Public school was declared victorious – by no coincidence, 1967 was the

year that transfer of powers from the Federal to Territorial Government began.

Browsing through the yearbooks that followed, one can appreciate the amount of school pride in Yellowknife. The William McDonald junior high school yearbook for 1978/1979 highlighted the winter carnival held on Frame Lake. The students participated in various activities such as dog sled races, honey bag throw, obstacles course, arm chair races, snow show races, 3-legged race, curling, volleyball and broomball. The school also organized annual spring teas, baking and rummage sales, talent shows, and exchange trips within Canada. French programs were being integrated into the school in the 1970s and many of the exchange trips were coordinated with Quebec.

~ The Modern Era ~

Yellowknife's next construction boom occurred when it was chosen as Capital of the Northwest Territories in 1967. Both Sir John Franklin High School and Mildred Hall Elementary school were expanded while an entirely new school, J.H. Sissons Elementary, was opened in 1975 in a new residential area of town along Forrest Drive.⁴⁰ The growth of the community necessitated a new middle school and in 1982 a modern William McDonald Junior High was built on Taylor Road and the 1947 school building was torn down.⁴¹

Meanwhile, in the far-flung suburbs of an expanding Yellowknife, there was dire need for public education. This part of the city was represented only by the Catholic school system, with St. Joseph elementary school having been built in 1978. Between 1985 and 1988, during planning for the new facility, classes were held in four portable trailers on the future school site in the Frame Lake South subdivision. Opened in August 1988, the school (K-6) was named after Norman J. McPherson, a long-time educator in the Northwest Territories. This was followed by the completion of the Range Lake North school (K-8) in 1993 in another new subdivision.

This period also saw the end of government-managed, centralized schools in the north, permitting high-school level education to smaller

communities. In Yellowknife, the Akaitcho Hall dormitory closed in 1994 and Sir John Franklin High School, previously run by the Federal and Territorial Governments and populated by pupils from across the NWT, was free to chart a new direction under the management of the local school board.

In the 21st century the demands of public education in Yellowknife continue unabated. The Yellowknife Education District No. 1 expands alongside the growing community to ensure that all students receive the best possible educational programs, experiences and opportunities. It now represents over 3,500 students in Yellowknife through six school facilities and provides contract superintendency services to the nearby First Nation schools of N'dilo and Dettah. It also co-administers an acclaimed French immersion program and operates J.H. Sissons and École St. Cyr as francophone facilities.

It is a system that has emerged from very humble beginnings when, in 1938, a group of civic-minded pioneers of Yellowknife emptied their pockets to fund a part-time school. They turned their sights to an accountable school system funded by their own tax dollars and in 1939 Yellowknife Education District No. 1 was forged by official decree. Today, while our modern facilities and world-class resources are a far cry from the meager provisions of a log cabin, we celebrate our cherished school heritage and honour the pioneers who made it all possible. ~

~ Bibliography and References ~

Meeting minutes of the School District dating back to 1939 made available through the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Center NWT Archives and the Yellowknife Education District No. 1 provide a definitive public record as to the evolution of education in Yellowknife.

A number of other published resources were made available and these are outlined below in the list of references.

-
- ¹ “Time for School” The Prospector, July 30, 1938
 - ² “School Organized” The Prospector, November 4, 1938
 - ³ “Public School to Open on Monday” The Prospector, January 28, 1939
 - ⁴ “Mildred Hall New Teacher is in Charge” The Prospector, March 4, 1939
 - ⁵ “Nature Aids Teacher in Far North” The Calgary Daily Herald, January 6, 1940
 - ⁶ “School is Over” The Prospector, July 1, 1939
 - ⁷ “Community Fete D.T. Munroe” The Prospector, September 3, 1939
 - ⁸ “Yellowknife Elects School Board” The Prospector, August 26, 1939
 - ⁹ “Education radio address recalls school history in Yellowknife” News of the North, March 16, 1961
 - ¹⁰ “School Opens” The Prospector, September 3, 1939
 - ¹¹ “Nature Aids Teacher in Far North” The Calgary Daily Herald, January 6, 1940
 - ¹² “Memories of Yellowknife in the ‘40s” by Christine May, Yellowknife Homecoming Supplement, June 13, 1984
 - ¹³ The Northern Miner, October 10, 1940

-
- ¹⁴ “Education radio address recalls school history in Yellowknife” News of the North, March 16, 1961; “To Occupy New School Monday” The Yellowknife Blade, November 16, 1940
- ¹⁵ “Education radio address recalls school history in Yellowknife” The News of the North, March 16, 1961
- ¹⁶ “School Sidewalk Complete” The Yellowknife Blade, February 18, 1943
- ¹⁷ Hazel Midgley story in: “Yellowknife: An Illustrated History” Sechelt, B.C.: Nor'West Pub.; Yellowknife Seniors Society, 1990. pp 72-73
- ¹⁸ Pat Tefler story in: “Yellowknife: An Illustrated History” Sechelt, B.C.: Nor'West Pub.; Yellowknife Seniors Society, 1990.
- ¹⁹ Joe Malmsten story in: “Yellowknife Tales: Sixty Years of Stories from Yellowknife” Yellowknife, NWT: Outcrop Ltd., 2000.
- ²⁰ “Education radio address recalls school history in Yellowknife” The News of the North, March 16, 1961
- ²¹ “Memories of Yellowknife in the ‘40s” by Christine May, Yellowknife Homecoming Supplement, June 13, 1984
- ²² Moore report, 1944 – as referenced in: “Dreams & Visions: Education in the Northwest Territories from Early Days to 1984” Yellowknife, N.W.T.: Department of Education, Government of the Northwest Territories, 1991. pg 88
- ²³ “School Bells” The News of the North, September 15, 1945; “Yellowknife School Board Sees Need of New Building” The News of the North, February 16, 1946; “Yellowknife School Opens With Record Attendance” The News of the North, September 5, 1946
- ²⁴ Young-Hubbert, Mildred. “Because It Was There...Into Canada’s North” Markdale, Ont.: Mildred Young Hubbert, 1993.
- ²⁵ Young-Hubbert, Mildred. “Because It Was There...Into Canada’s North” Markdale, Ont.: Mildred Young Hubbert, 1993.
- ²⁶ “Education radio address recalls school history in Yellowknife” The News of the North, March 16, 1961

²⁷ “Dreams & Visions: Education in the Northwest Territories from Early Days to 1984” Yellowknife, N.W.T.: Department of Education, Government of the Northwest Territories, 1991. pp 93-94

²⁸ “School Auditorium is Opened” The News of the North, March 7, 1952

²⁹ “Schools Opening” The News of the North, September 4, 1953

³⁰ McCann, Doris. “A History of School District No. 1: 1939 – 1976”;
School Minutes

³¹ “Dedication Ceremony, Mildred Hall Log Schoolhouse” by David Lovell,
February 2001.

³² “Frame & Perkins Buses Exempt from Colour Law” The News of the
North, February 21, 1973

³³ Norma Dunsmore story in: McCann, Doris. “A History of School District
No. 1: 1939 – 1976”

³⁴ McCann, Doris. “A History of School District No. 1: 1939 – 1976”

³⁵ The News of the North, June 6, 1966

³⁶ “School’s Back” The Yellowknifer, September 12, 1973

³⁷ Annual Report of the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, 1969

³⁸ Bill & Rollie Holden story in “Yellowknife Tales: Sixty Years of Stories
from Yellowknife” Yellowknife, NWT: Outcrop Ltd., 2000. pg 175-177

³⁹ Bill Braden story submitted

⁴⁰ The News of the North, October 15, 1975

⁴¹ The Yellowknifer, September 22, 1982

~ Milestones ~

November 1938	Provisional School Board is organized and fundraising for a school begins. Grants are obtained from government and sponsorship from local business.
December 1938	Classes are organized in Vera Lane's house in Old Town.
January 1939	The log school house opens with D.A. Davies as part-time teacher.
February 1939	Mildred Hall arrives as permanent, full-time teacher.
May 1939	Provisional School Board organizes spring break up lottery as a fundraiser.
June 1939	First graduates of each grade receive a silver dollar from the Daughters of the Midnight Sun.
August 1939	Ratepayers vote in the first three trustees of Yellowknife School District No. 1.
October 1939	F. Buckley awarded contract to supply firewood to school at \$10 per cord.
1939/1940 Term	Slightly larger school building is rented from Mining Corporation of Canada.
February 1940	Motion approved to construct a school between Yellowknife and the gold mines.
August 1940	Contract to construct new school awarded to Resolution Lumber Company at cost of \$4500.
November 1940	New two-classroom public school opens with 45 pupils in what is now known as the School Draw.
December 1940	Carl Jensen is engaged to transport children to school during the winter months at \$4 per day.

November 1941	School plans to erect 35-foot flagpole.
January 1942	Daisy Albers is asked to teach music as per the curriculum, and a piano is purchased.
April 1942	The school's power bill for the month is \$21.
August 1942	Vic Johnson is awarded contract to construct school addition.
February 1944	Board moves that the government speed up the passing of a new School Ordinance applicable to present conditions in the NWT, as the current ordinance dates to 1901. They recommend that the Alberta Program of Studies be officially adopted to the NWT.
March 1944	Several students who achieved excellent grades during 1943 examinations are awarded \$5 and \$10 War Bond certificates.
December 1945	Board is to investigate purchase of sound movie projector.
March 1946	Teacher accommodations building is completed, a former US Army hut used on Alaska Highway construction.
September 1945	Renovations in the school allow for construction of a music room and providing for Grade 10 to 12 classes.
September 1946	Two more trustees are added to the School Board, now governed by five members. The School District is expanded to 15 miles radius from Lot 1, Block 1 in Yellowknife in accordance with amendments to the School Ordinance.
December 1946	Rule, Wynn & Rule Architects of Edmonton present plans for a new school, to be built in stages. The School board approves construction of the first unit of eight classes, with addition of six more classrooms if needed. The NWT Council government agrees to provide \$150,000 in funding for the school.

April 1947	25,000 feet of lumber and 2000 sacks of cements are ordered for school construction and to be delivered by Cat Train. Dr. Oliver Stanton offers to donate cash prizes to pupils with best academic standings in Grades 9 and 12.
June 1947	Concrete foundations are poured for new school.
August 1947	Sixty school desks are ordered and shipped from St. Vincent de Paul penitentiary in Quebec.
November 1947	Frame & Perkins obtains contract for busing students to school at \$23 per day. Three routes are drawn up based on bussing students from Old Town, and the three gold mines: Con, Negus, and Giant.
December 1947	New public school opens on downtown site with 180 pupils.
March 1948	Equipment is ordered and arrangements made to supply milk to pupils. School board asks NWT Council government for grant of 50% of the direct operating costs of school.
April 1948	The school's fluorescent lights and movie projector are blamed for causing local radio interference.
May 1948	Motion to approve a community library in the school is carried. Reverend Allaby offers to donate 200 books.
March 1949	Community library opens in Public School.
April 1949	Pupils get a half-day holiday in recognition of Newfoundland's entry into the Dominion of Canada.
May 1949	The board discusses starting a kindergarten program for children up to age five, but the idea is abandoned because of poor response from public.
November 1949	The board discusses the problem of Dene and Metis children not attending classes and writes to NWT Council setting forth views on aboriginal education needs in Yellowknife.

March 1950	Founding meeting of the Yellowknife Home & School Association is held, a group to promote cooperation between teachers, parents, and the School Board.
March 1952	Public school expanded to accommodate 225 pupils.
September 1952	School orders gym equipment: one horse, one parallel bar, one spring board, and six gym mats.
November 1952	Under no condition is the Frame & Perkins school bus allowed to travel on the ice road from Old Town to Giant Mine.
April 1953	The board discusses formation of full commercial, home economics, and industrial arts courses.
July 1953	Miss Stoltz is hired to start Home Economics courses.
October 1954	A kindergarten program is discussed but again rejected for lack of public interest.
January 1955	Principal recommends the formation of a school library.
September 1955	Woodworking shop class is started with Mr. Campbell as teacher.
September 1956	New playground area is to be fenced and properly landscaped with grass for next year.
October 1956	Teachers threaten to forever cancel school dances because students are smuggling in liquor.
March 1957	Sagging and broken trusses are observed on the auditorium roof prompting a major retrofit of the school building. The board approves purchase of an industrial-sized vacuum cleaner similar to the one used at Giant Mine.
January 1958	Adult typing classes are approved, to be taught in the school by Joyce Dunphy.

September 1958	With completion of the Sir John Franklin high school operated by the Federal Government, the public school is converted to a Grades 1 to 9 facility only.
November 1958	Students are granted permission to use the Yellowknife Curling Club facilities one afternoon per week, at a cost of \$2.00 per student charged to the Board.
August 1959	Bylaw No. 2 to authorize the borrowing of \$55,000 on debenture for addition and alterations to the school goes before a plebiscite vote, and is approved by ratepayers.
November 1959	The need for a French program and teacher is discussed.
August 1960	Olive Clayton is hired as first school librarian.
March 1961	A new boiler is purchased that will run off cheaper Bunker C fuel oil. An appropriate fuel tank is acquired from Giant Mine.
August 1961	Bill Holden is hired as new caretaker for the school.
August 1963	Max King is forced to resign as secretary-treasurer of the school board on charges of embezzlement and fraud.
November 1963	A surprise fire drill has everyone evacuated from the school in one minute, 25 seconds.
June 1964	Richards, Berretti & Jellinek Architects are retained to design a nine-class elementary school for Yellowknife.
December 1964	Two additional board positions are made available on Yellowknife School District No. 1, now managed by a board of seven trustees.
March 1965	Solar Construction is awarded \$1.2 million bid to construct new elementary school.
September 1965	New elementary school is completed and opened (later called Mildred Hall). Original school becomes Junior High classes only.

June 1966	Official opening is held for the new elementary school.
May 1966	Robert Jenkins begins shop instruction based on a new industrial arts curriculum for junior high classes.
1967	Industrial shop program is expanded to include graphic arts section. Yellowknife Public School students produce their first yearbook. Centennial Garden project is started.
1968	Yellowknife School District No. 1 joins Alberta School Trustee Association. Bus passes are issued to students.
April 1969	Responsibility for education in the Northwest Territories is transferred to the GNWT.
September 1969	A two-room school is opened in Dettah under the supervision of the Territorial Government.
1969/1970 term	Board plans to begin teaching French language courses.
1970	Yellowknife School District No. 1 joins Canadian School Trustee Association.
August 1970	Board presents a proposal to sell postcards of the popular Centennial Garden.
October 1971	Official opening of elementary school additions and kindergarten teepee classroom.
March 1973	French program from Grades 1-9 is mandatory. School is to investigate teaching native languages.
June 1973	Milk vending machines installed. Approve purchase of amp and guitar for music program, cost \$165.
November 1973	Board to consider adult crossing guards for Franklin Avenue.
1973/1974 term	R.K. Davids is appointed first Superintendent of Schools for School District No. 1.

March 1974	New school names christened: William McDonald Junior High and Mildred Hall Elementary. Cavan Construction is awarded \$1.5 million project for new 16-room school to be called J.H. Sissons Elementary.
June 1974	School will improve acoustics in kindergarten teepee by installing special tiles.
August 1974	Cost of busing to Con, Giant, Latham Island is \$280 per day.
1974/1975 term	Yellowknife School District No. 1 is to assume operation of Abe Miller school.
July 1975	Motion to bus 10 children to school from new Kam Lake subdivision approved.
October 1975	New policy prohibits smoking in the school buildings and on school grounds, with the exception of staff rooms and offices.
November 1975	Official opening is held for J.H. Sissons Elementary School.
1976	Government of the NWT passes the Education Ordinance and Yellowknife School District No. 1 is renamed Yellowknife Education District No. 1.
October 1976	School board proposes off-street parking lot for buses in front of Mildred Hall school.
February 1977	Bill Holden, maintenance superintendent since 1962, retires.
April 1978	Board unanimously votes in favour for constructing a new junior high school at the “Pud Lake” site near Con Mine’s tailings ponds.
July 1978	Motion to establish French Immersion programs at both elementary schools approved.

April 1979	Board drops French Immersion study due to insufficient interest. First annual Science Fair.
May 1979	Motion to provide French immersion at Grade 4 level at Sissons for the 79/80 year if a qualified teacher can be found.
June 1979	First bomb threat occurs at William McDonald Junior High School.
September 1979	Extension at Mildred Hall completed.
1979/1980	Sex education classes are being taught in Grade 9, entitled 'Conception, Birth and Responsible Sexuality Program'. Gifted/Enrichment Program is started with 24 children enrolled in advanced education initiatives.
March 1980	Motion to provide French Immersion for Grades 4 and 5 at Sissons for the 80/81 school year.
April 1980	Purchase of new junior high school site from the City of Yellowknife.
October 1980	Blasting starts for new junior high school.
February 1981	Board sells Yellowknife Apartments to Circle Holdings for \$92,000.
June 1981	Pouring cement for foundation of new junior high school.
June-July 1982	A massive yard sale and salvage is held at the old William McDonald school. The building is torn down soon thereafter. Many of the old windows are acquired for greenhouses and cabins. Robinson's Trucking is awarded the demolition contract and uses the debris to fill in a slough behind its property on Old Airport Road.
September 1982	New William McDonald Junior High School opens on Taylor Road. Apple computer and printer are to be purchased for use in Gifted/Enrichment Program.

May 1983	Schools to purchase 15 Apple IIe computers and three printers for a cost of \$39,000.
July 1983	J.H. Sissons School will build an elevator and wheelchair ramp.
September 1985	Demand for a school in the new Frame Lake subdivision results in the construction of portable classrooms on the corner of Finlayson Drive and Range Lake Road.
April 1988	Computer lab is to be built for William McDonald Junior High School.
August 1988	N.J. McPherson Elementary School opens on Finlayson Drive and Range Lake Road.
March 1989	Tender for 3-room portable classrooms at N.J. McPherson awarded to ATCO. Computer lab for Mildred Hall is to be constructed.
April 1989	Board passes a motion in support of “French as a first language” program subject to funding.
June 1989	Board passes a motion in support of establishing a francophone school provided funding is available. The “Going Fishing” Cross Cultural Camp at Frank’s Channel teaches 28 children from Yellowknife and Behchoko about traditional knowledge.
October 1989	Board passes a motion to name francophone school annex at J.H. Sissons Ecòle Allain St. Cyr.
February 1990	Frame & Perkins bus line is sold to Arctic Frontier Carriers who now operate the school bus franchise.
March 1990	Yellowknife Education District No. 1 adopts official motto, “Education for Life”. Approval granted for \$1.2 million, 5-classroom addition to N.J. McPherson. Official opening is held for Ecòle Allain St. Cyr in portables next to J.H. Sissons Elementary School.

September 1990	N.J. McPherson 5-classroom addition is completed. Board passes a motion to purchase a 4.6 hectare site from the City of Yellowknife for a new school in the Range Lake area.
October 1990	A contest to design a logo for Yellowknife Education District No. 1 is open to students.
March 1991	Tamarack Computers is awarded the contract to furnish new computers for school libraries.
March 1992	Clark Bowler Construction is awarded tender for Range Lake Elementary School at a cost of \$7 million.
September 1992	Official opening of new school board offices on corner of Franklin Avenue and 53 rd street.
January 1993	Motion to approach GNWT Minister of Education regarding transfer of control of Sir John Franklin High School to the Yellowknife Education District No. 1.
September 1993	Range Lake North Elementary School opens. City Cabs provides handi-van services for disabled students.
August 1994	Board agrees to provide governance of Sir John Franklin High School for an interim period.
December 1995	Terry Keefe, superintendent of education for 8½ years, retires. During his term in office, Mr. Keefe oversaw the establishment of two schools into new residential suburbs, the creation of a francophone school, construction of district offices, the transfer of Sir John Franklin high school from GNWT to the School Board, increased use of technology in classrooms, and ongoing professional development of teachers and administrators.
July 1998	Construction begins on the new École Allain St. Cyr school. First ever summer school programs are offered.
January 1999	\$14 million renovations begin to modernize Sir John Franklin High School begin.

June 1999	School bus contract awarded to Cardinal Coach Lines Ltd.
August 2000	Negotiations commence to start transferring governance of Ecòle Allain St. Cyr from Yellowknife Education District #1 to a commission status.
September 2000	Official opening of new K'alemi Dene School in N'Dilo with moosehide ribbon cutting ceremony.
November 2000	Grand opening is held of newly renovated Sir John Franklin High School.
October 2002	The YK1 website is launched.
February 2003	The board moves that work proceed on Mildred Hall renovations as presented by FSC Architects, and that the design for the new school support an aboriginal literacy and cultural theme in its design and general appearance.
April 2003	Renovations at Mildred Hall school are to be subject to 'green demolition' methods to recycle as much material as possible.
December 2003	The Millie Reno Spirit Committee, comprised of students from Mildred Hall school, present a renovations themed dance number for board members.
September 2004	The NWT Montessori Society reach agreement with YK1 District to provide Montessori Elementary programs, with classes to be held at N.J. McPherson school.
February 2005	Grand opening of the Akaitcho Trades & Technical Centre (ATTC) at Sir John Franklin high school, offering a wide range of technical courses in skilled trades, media, computer applications to prepare students for entering the workforce.
September 2005	Early French Immersion programs are now offered at J.H. Sissons Elementary School. Aboriginal language and culture-based education programs are expanded into all schools, where 25% of student enrollment is Dene. Grand opening of newly renovated Mildred Hall School is held,

in conjunction with it being recognized as among the Top 40 schools in Canada.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| January 2006 | Students at Mildred Hall school celebrate the completion of renovations, and when asked to choose a catered lunch party, they pick McDonalds. |
| June 2006 | Sod turning ceremonies are held for the new K'alemi Dene School in N'dilo. |
| November 2006 | N.J. McPherson elementary school raises \$2300 to buy 19 wheelchairs for children in Mexico. |
| March 2007 | Students present a proposal to install wind turbine technology to help power Sir John Franklin high school, predicted to provide 2% of the facility's power needs. |
| March 2008 | The new pellet-boiler for Sir John Franklin high school is now operational and expected to provide 20% in savings. |
| June 2008 | J.H. Sisson's elementary school to discontinue the English program effective immediately and become a French Immersion facility only. |
| December 2008 | YK1 Christmas Parade float wins first prize in the category of non-profit organizations. |
| May 2009 | Cosmetology lab grand opening is held at Sir John Franklin for students that wish to pursue hairdressing and esthetics. 91 students express an interest in the program. |
| June 2009 | Interpretive tours are started in the old Mildred Hall log school to provide a glimpse of early education in Yellowknife. |
| September 2009 | Grand opening is held of the new K'alemi Dene School in N'Dilo. |
| November 2009 | The Route 51 learning Institute opens in Yellowknife to offer students ages 16 to 21 to perform their high school education via Alberta distance learning courses on the Internet. |

February 2011	Yoga for Wellness programs is now an accredited course at Sir John Franklin high school.
January 2012	Canadian Paralympian and philanthropist for people with spinal cord injuries Rick Hansen, visits Mildred Hall School to present an award to students who make a difference in the world.
February 2012	To start Golden Garbage Can award for the cleanest classrooms.
August 2014	YK1 celebrates its 'diamond' anniversary as a School District and events are planned throughout the fall to celebrate 75 years of public education in Yellowknife. YK1 has six schools including École J.H. Sissons, Mildred Hall School, N.J. Macpherson School, Range Lake North School, École William McDonald Middle School, École Sir John Franklin High School. It also provides Superintendency services to the community schools of Ndilo, K'àlemì Dene School, and Dettah, Kaw Tay Whee School.