

MS 12

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*An Historical Study of Okanagan Centre  
and the Centre School.*

*a discussion on  
The Correlation between the  
Population of a Community &  
the Enrollment of the School.*

*a paper done for the History of  
Education Course 423 University of Victoria  
Christine Funk - Fall, 1990.*

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The Presbyterian Church leased the Okanagan Centre School from 1911-1932.



A DISCUSSION ON

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE  
THE POPULATION OF A COMMUNITY AND THE  
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Okanagan Centre Elementary  
(1952 - the second room was added.)



ED-P 423 (F50)

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION  
BRIAN. A BAIN

SUBMITTED BY:

CHRISTINE FUNK

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

STUDENT # 688545

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the Correlation Between the  
Population of a Community and the  
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The History of Education  
Brian. A Bain

Submitted By: Christine Funk  
University of Victoria  
Student #688545

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If a school is initiated within a community, for the educational purposes and social use of a community, one would think that the management and general control of that school would be directly affected by that community. It is my thought that, although the commencement of a school might be initiated by a community, the change within a rural school, is more often affected by external forces and provincial legislation, then by the changes within the actual community itself. My thesis is based on an historical study done on Okanagan Centre School, (1911-1984). It is an example of one of the many rural schools that went through unexpected developments in British Columbia in the nineteen hundreds. The school is situated in the community of Okanagan Centre, in the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia.

The commencement of the school took place in 1911<sup>1</sup>. Okanagan Centre was a thriving community in those early years, boasting of: steamboat services, a road to the nearby community of Winfield, two hotels, a general store and a butcher shop. It was proud of its "modern" services which included: daily mail, and a local telephone communication system that reached other centers within the length valley. "Eighty per cent of the residents were of English decent<sup>2</sup> and saw the need to formally educate their children. There were not enough children to qualify as for a Rural Assisted School. "Extra children were imported, boarding in the community and commuting on weekends to their homes in the Fir Valley and to the area across the Okanagan Lake<sup>3</sup>. The provincial requirements were thereby

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met and the first school was opened in the Presbyterian Church. The first enrollment consisted of sixteen children.

By 1912, the population of "The Centre" had doubled.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this incredible growth in the community, the school population decreased by three youngsters.<sup>5</sup> A decrease of three children is not significant at this time, as it could easily be attributed to the moving of a single family from the community. But to visualize this increase in population, it is curious that the school population did not also show some increase. It is my thought that the newcomers were likely youthful and without school-age families.

By 1913, Okanagan Centre now boasted a CPR dock, a cannery, two packing houses, two churches, two general stores, a Chinese laundry, the two hotels and a Post Office.<sup>6</sup> It appeared that "The Centre" was an established, thriving community. Still, the school enrollment remained between thirteen and eighteen children.<sup>7</sup> It continued to be held in the Presbyterian Church until the early twenties.<sup>8</sup>

When the first World War broke out, many of the men left to fight, and many never did return. The community realized a vast decrease in population. The stores closed out, the cannery shut down, and one of the hotels burned down, not to be rebuilt.<sup>9</sup> The school enrollment remained constant!

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The community showed no real growth during the next five years although there were some improvements for social functions such as tennis courts built on the old hotel site. The school enrollment showed a slight decrease but without consequence.

In the 1920's, a few notable community happenings occurred, showing no influence on the school situation. Although a safer road to Winfield was constructed, the value of real estate appeared to decrease. The Okanagan Land Company saw no purpose in continuing its efforts, and left the area. No one saw the Okanagan Centre as a future developing community in which to invest. The enrollment of the school remained stable during this time of economic question. It is my thought that the Provincial Ministry had its second real effect on the Okanagan School (the first being the support it gave to the commencement of the school as a Rural Assisted School in 1911).<sup>10</sup>

In 1925, a commission of inquiry was established by the Department of Education. There were many recommendations that had no immediate effect on "The Centre school" such as the "6-3-3" or "middle school" concept.<sup>11</sup> Okanagan Centre School continued to contain grades 1-8 for years to come.

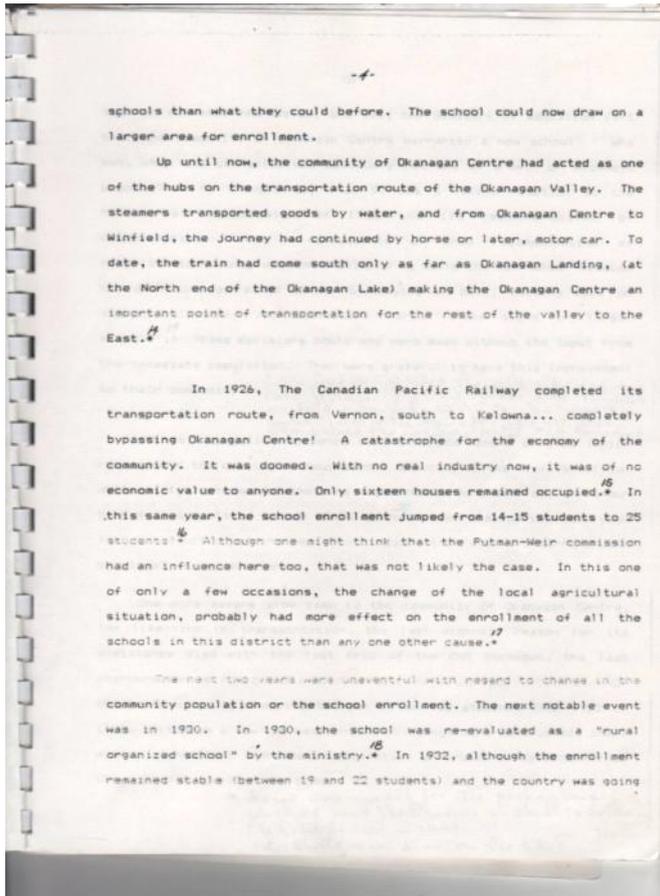
The Putman-Weir likely did have an effect on this particular school, in that one of its recommendations was to consolidate the many school districts within the province of British Columbia. "The Centre" School now became recognized as a "Rural School"<sup>12</sup> at the same time that the Inspector, T. R. Hall, consolidated his Okanagan inspectorate by including some of the rural areas such as Okanagan Centre.<sup>13</sup> With better roads, children could now be transported easier to and from

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schools than what they could before. The school could now draw on a larger area for enrollment.

Up until now, the community of Okanagan Centre had acted as one of the hubs on the transportation route of the Okanagan Valley. The steamers transported goods by water, and from Okanagan Centre to Winfield, the journey had continued by horse or later, motor car. To date, the train had come south only as far as Okanagan Landing, (at the North end of the Okanagan Lake) making the Okanagan Centre an important point of transportation for the rest of the valley to the East.<sup>14</sup>

In 1926, The Canadian Pacific Railway completed its transportation route, from Vernon, south to Kelowna... completely bypassing Okanagan Centre! A catastrophe for the economy of the community. It was doomed. With no real industry now, it was of no economic value to anyone. Only sixteen houses remained occupied.<sup>15</sup> In this same year, the school enrollment jumped from 14-15 students to 25 students.<sup>16</sup> Although one might think that the Putman-Weir commission had an influence here too, that was not likely the case. In this one of only a few occasions, the change of the local agricultural situation, probably had more effect on the enrollment of all the schools in this district than any one other cause.<sup>17</sup>

The next two years were uneventful with regard to change in the community population or the school enrollment. The next notable event was in 1930. In 1930, the school was re-evaluated as a "rural organized school" by the ministry.<sup>18</sup> In 1932, although the enrollment remained stable (between 19 and 22 students) and the country was going

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into an economic depression, and yet, the Ministry of Education felt that the community of Okanagan Centre warranted a new school! Why now, when the community was obviously not one of growth or economic promise? My thought is, that it was a latent reaction to the Putman-Weir Commission of 1926 and its recommendation of consolidation. As a consequence of this recommendation of consolidation, money was now available to build the new school because the district had saved money "by buying in bulk, cutting back on secretarial staff and attempting larger class sizes in larger schools".<sup>19</sup> These decisions could and were made without the input from the immediate population. They were grateful to have this improvement to their community.

*Ch. J. and Co. wanted the old site for a full storage. The new school was built on site owned by C.V. Co. and was built under plan of the house for the old building. 1000 square ft. building. Hotel & boarding house.*

It is interesting to note, that the Kidd Report of 1932 (which recommended the cutting of educational spending by twenty-five million dollars also recommended that one room schools be closed out in favour of bigger schools of larger class sizes<sup>20</sup>) was released the same year that construction of the new school began, too late to interfere with previously made decisions.

One more severe blow came to the community of Okanagan Centre. The life-line in transportation, the last economic reason for its existence died with the last trip of the CNR Sicamous, the last sternwheeler to run the Okanagan Lake. The school population did NOT change drastically, keeping between 15 and 22 students from 1932 to 1941. Although a few new residential buildings were constructed, there was no significant increase in population or growth in development in the community during this time.

*\* Home was needed for the parking house. Workers said the pleasure was to retire. (The hotel burned in 1947. The site is now home on the site)*

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From 1941 through 1945, the community remains small, as a residential community without commerce. The school did become part of the larger district of Central Okanagan United District in 1944, in speculation, this was in response to the Cameron Report and its recommendation for consolidation of districts that was occurring throughout the province.<sup>21</sup> It seemed to have no notable effect on "The Centre" School at this time. The school enrollment remains between 22 and 29 students with the exception of 1944 when the enrollment mysteriously increases from 23 to 40 students in 1945, and back down to 23 students again in 1946.<sup>22</sup> Although the only remaining hotel burned down in 1947, there were no other significant changes in the community population, and the school enrollment continued to be predictable.

The freezing winter of 1950 caused many hardships for the people of the Okanagan Valley. Many of the fruit trees were lost, leaving little work for the coming season. Many people chose to move out of the area.<sup>23</sup> Yet just two years later, the school received an addition of another classroom and washroom facilities.<sup>24</sup> It is my thought that this came about due to the 1948 session of the Legislature which discussed the need for financial adjustments within the province. The government would share the cost of building a new rural school on a fifty-fifty basis between the Department and the District.<sup>25</sup> At this same time, the nearby community of Winfield was showing a steady increase in school enrollment. Although busing was considered more economical at this time, the receiving school would have had to build a new classroom to accommodate the influx of students from the Okanagan Centre School. Busing would have continued to be an added expenditure.

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above and beyond this basic cost of building. It was again the influence of outside conditions that caused this change to the school, NOT the people of the community.

With the new addition, the school enrollment jumped from 27 students to 42 students, and remains 'high' (between 33 and 42 students) until the mid sixties. During this time, there were no significant changes within the immediate community, but issues were being considered within the School District in the form of greater consolidation. The school would now hold primary children in one room and intermediate children in the other room. The grades included were 1-3 and 4-6 only.<sup>27</sup> It appears that the suggestion of the Chant Report of 1958, to include grade 7 in the elementary school<sup>28</sup> was not followed in this particular case. It is my thought that busing did occur during the early 1960's and that the grade 7 children were possibly bused to the larger school of Winfield Elementary, as its enrollment appears to grow rapidly. The community had little or no influence on such decisions, as they were made at a district level, in Kelowna.

In 1965, the school enrollment dropped from 33 students to 17. At this time the new Wood Lake Elementary school opened in Winfield. The Okanagan Centre school came under the administration of the Wood Lake principal. Obviously, some accommodation was made for the Okanagan Centre children through busing, as the enrollment of "The Centre" school now changed to primary children only. These details would come under the "housekeeping duties" of the district as a whole. The quiet community of Okanagan Centre again had little influence on such decisions. The Okanagan Centre School was now used to educate the

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youngest members of the community only. All decisions regarding maintenance, enrollment, and curriculum were in the hands of an administrator of another school, the superintendent in another town, and/or the Education Department, located in another city.

By 1969, the enrollment of Okanagan Centre school declines to ten children<sup>30</sup>. There are now two other elementary schools in the area of the district, with portables that are far more efficient to operate than the school 'over the hill'.

In 1970 the school has an enrollment of 67 children<sup>31</sup>. The nearest city of Kelowna now controls the local school and the closest community of Winfield regulates the enrollment. The children are 'overflow' from Wood Lake Elementary and are being bused in daily. More portable classrooms are set up at Wood Lake Elementary to accommodate this influx of children and the Okanagan Centre School is closed out temporarily in 1972<sup>32</sup>.

This scenario continues for the next twelve years as the nearby communities of Winfield and Oyama are outgrowing their educational facilities. A new school is required in Oyama. While construction is going on, the children are bused into "The Centre" for two years until their new facility is completed. Once again, the Centre School is temporarily closed<sup>33</sup>.

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re-opened to the district. From 1974 until 1984, two classes of Grade 5 children were bused in daily from Wood Lake Elementary for their 'rural' education with 'country charm'.

In 1984, Okanagan Centre School is closed.<sup>34</sup> "The Centre" children are bused to the new Davidson Elementary School for English or to Wood Lake Elementary School for French Immersion. Even in the last days of the school, all major decisions were in the hands of people, and administration outside of the community.

The community of Okanagan Centre did what it sought to do, and that was to provide public education for the children of their community. In retrospect, it had very little control over the actual development or nature of 'progress' of the facility. In fact, the political powers of the province and of the Central Okanagan School District, based in Kelowna, had more INFLUENCE, more control, and more effect on the actual happenings of the school, whether it be the curriculum, or the annual enrollment, then the community might realize.

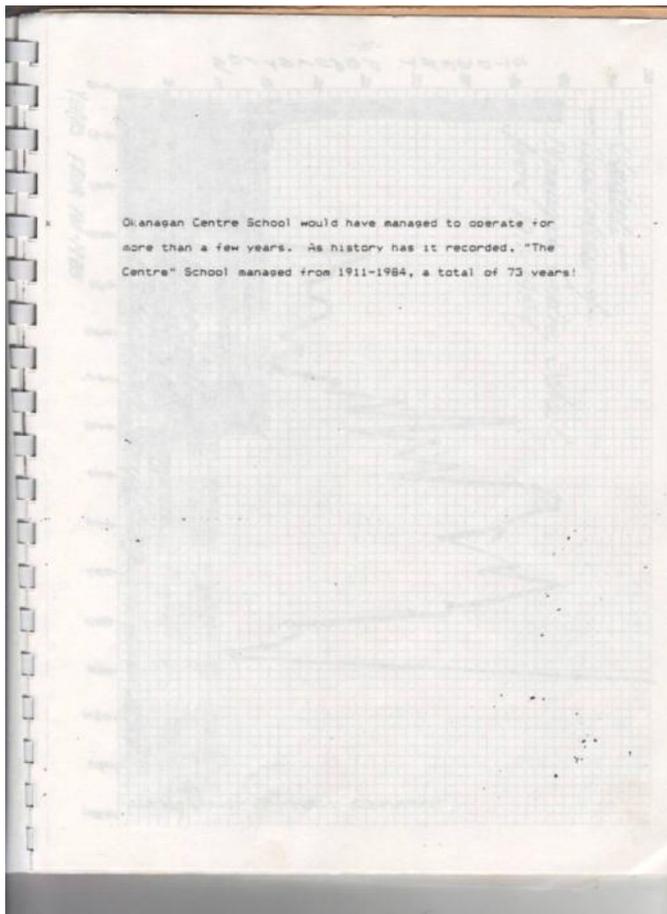
It is my opinion that the desire and the determination for an education system was really, the only notable input of the community of Okanagan Centre toward its school. The Putman-Weir of 1925, the Kidd Report of 1932, the Cameron Report of 1944, all dictated to the community what they saw as the best changes for all concerned. This must have been generally accepted by the community, as no real disagreements were noted in any of the local newspapers. The ironic point to be noted here is, that if the assistance, influence, and controls had not come from 'without', it is very doubtful that the

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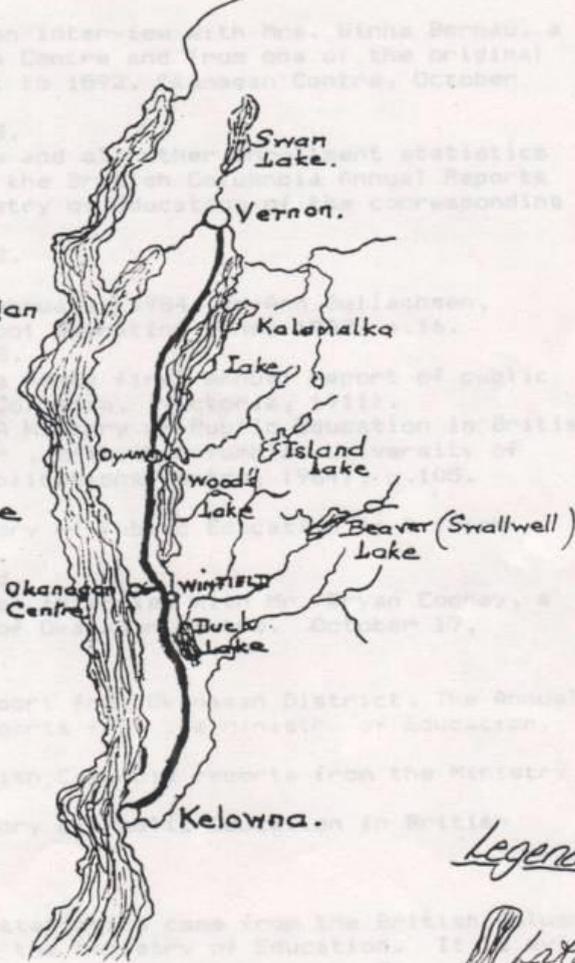
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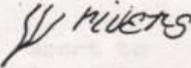


Okanagan Centre School would have managed to operate for more than a few years. As history has it recorded. "The Centre" School managed from 1911-1984, a total of 73 years!

# A Map of the Okanagan Valley - North after 1926

13. As noted from an interview with Mrs. Nina Bernau, a  
resident of Okanagan Centre and was one of the original  
settlers coming back to 1872. Okanagan Centre, October  
29, 1940.  
14. Okanagan, p. 28.  
15. These statistics and other important statistics  
available are from the British Columbia Annual Reports  
show the Ministry of Education, corresponding  
year.  
16. Okanagan, p. 12.  
17. See note 13.  
18. Okanagan Centre, p. 16.  
19. British Columbia, p. 105.  
20. British Columbia, p. 105.  
21. Johnson, F.M., A History of British Columbia, Vancouver  
British Columbia Press, 1905.  
22. See note 13.  
23. Johnson, F.M., A History of British Columbia, Vancouver  
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24. See note 13.  
25. See note 13.  
26. See note 13.  
27. See note 13.  
28. See note 13.  
29. See note 13.  
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96. See note 13.  
97. See note 13.  
98. See note 13.  
99. See note 13.  
100. See note 13.



- Legend
-  lakes
  -  rivers
  -  railroad
  -  community

NOTES

NOTES

- \*1 British Columbia Forty-first Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia (Victoria, 1911). Statistics charts.
- \*2 Brian Wilson, "K'lakokum." (Kelowna: Finlay Printing, 1976). p.28.
- \*3 As quoted from an interview with Mrs. Winna Bernau, a resident of Okanagan Centre and from one of the original families dating back to 1892. Okanagan Centre, October 28, 1990.
- \*4 "K'lakokum, p.28.
- \*5 These statistics and all other enrollment statistics until 1960 are from the British Columbia Annual Reports from the Ministry of Education of the corresponding year.
- \*6 "K'lakokum, p.12.
- \*7 See note #5.
- \*8 The Calendar, February, 1984; Jo-Ann Gullachsen, Okanagan Centre School Operating since 1932, p.16.
- \*9 "K'lakokum, p.28.
- \*10 British Columbia Forty first Annual Report of public schools of British Columbia, (Victoria, 1911).
- \*11 Johnson, F.H., A History of Public Education in British Columbia, (Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Publications Centre, 1964), p.105.
- \*12 See note #5.
- \*13 Johnson, A History of Public Education in British Columbia, p.117.
- \*14 See Map attached.
- \*15 As quoted from an interview with Mr. Bryan Cooney, a long time resident of Okanagan Centre. October 17, 1990.
- \*16 See note #5.
- \*17 Inspectorate report from Okanagan District. The Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education. 1926.
- \*18 The Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education. 1930.
- \*19 Johnson, A history of Public Education in British Columbia, p.116.
- \*20 Ibid., p.116.
- \*21 Ibid., p.128.
- \*22 Although these statistics came from the British Columbia Annual reports from the Ministry of Education. It is my thought that this statistic is a misprint. The enrollment returns to 23 the following year and there did not appear to be any notable changes in the enrollment in any nearby schools.
- \*23 Inspectorate of the Okanagan School District report to the Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education.
- \*24 The Calendar. February, 1984. Okanagan Centre School Operating Since 1932.

- \*1 British Columbia Forty-first Annual Report of the Public Schools of British Columbia (Victoria, 1911). Statistics charts.
- \*2 Brian Wilson, "K'lakokum." (Kelowna: Finlay Printing, 1976). p. 28..
- \*3 As Quoted from an interview with Mrs. Winna Bernau, a resident of Okanagan Centre and from one of the original families dating back to 1892. Okanagan Centre, October 29, 1990.
- \*4 "K'lakokum, p.28.
- \*5 These statistics and all other enrollment statistics until 1960 are from the British Columbia Annual Reports from the Ministry of Education of the corresponding year.
- \*6 "K'lakokum", p.12.
- \*7 See note #5.
- \*8 The Calendar, February, 1984; Jo-Ann Gullachsen, Okanagan Centre School Operating since 1932, p.16.
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- \*23 Inspectorate of the Okanagan School District report to the Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education.
- \*24 The Calendar. February, 1984. Okanagan Centre School Operating Since 1932.

- \*25 Johnson, A history of Public Education in British Columbia, p.132.
- \*26 Ibid., p.152.
- \*27 The Calendar, February, 1984. Okanagan Centre School Operating Since 1932.
- \*28 Johnson, A history of Public Education in British Columbia, p.261.
- \*29 The Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education.
- \*30 Noted from Statistics attained from the School Board Office of Central Okanagan, School District #23
- \*31 Ibid.
- \*32 The Calendar, February, 1984. Okanagan Centre School Operating Since 1932 and from the Statistics attained from the School Board Office of School District #23.
- \*33 Noted from Statistics attained from the School Board Office of Central Okanagan, School District #23 and from my own personal knowledge, as a teacher at Wood Lake Elementary and Learning Assistant to "The Centre" School.
- \*34 Please note \*33.

- \*25 Johnson, A history of Public Education in British Columbia, p.132.
- \*26 Ibid., p.152.
- \*27 The Calendar, February, 1984. Okanagan Centre School Operating Since 1932.
- \*28 Johnson, A history of Public Education in British Columbia, p.261.
- \*29 The Annual British Columbia reports from the Ministry of Education.
- \*30 Noted from Statistics attained from the School Board Office of Central Okanagan, School District #23
- \*31 Ibid.
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- \*34 Please see note \*33,

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 Mrs. Ann Land

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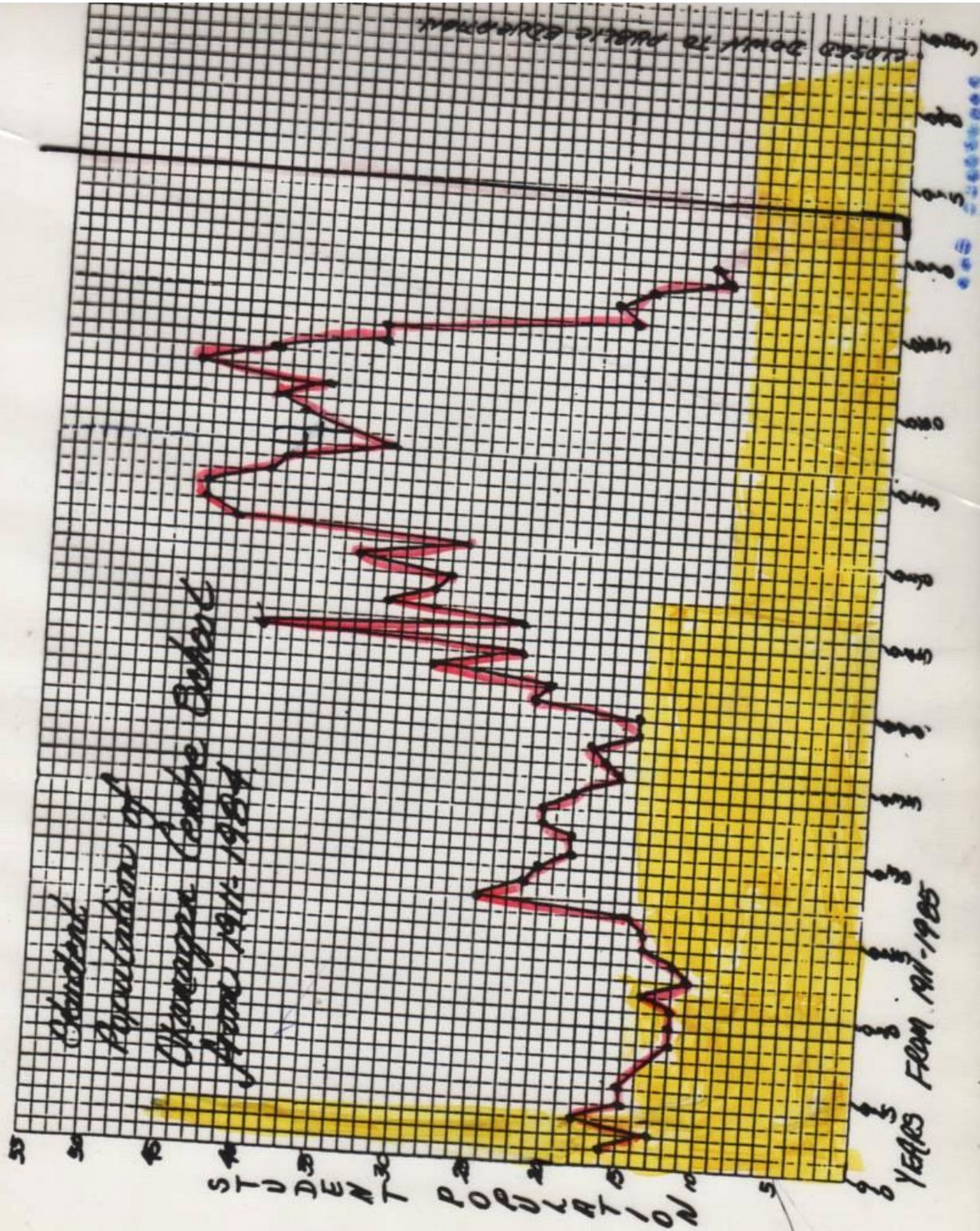
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*The new road encouraged  
travel and community  
grow.*



*K. Geiser B.C.  
April 1, 1922*

The new Camp Road entrance to the Centre with the dock and packing house in the background.

Photo courtesy — Mrs. H. Bernau



The construction of Camp Road route to Okanagan Centre, in the 1920's.  
Photo courtesy — Kelowna Museum

Okanagan Centre Elementary  
(1952 - the second  
room was added.) (1932-1984)

After the 2nd room  
kitchen was added

1952

Photo by DIVISION OF VISUAL EDUCATION  
CONTINUED BY PHOTO 1031 1984



M.S. 1  
MS 12

The 'new' school 1932.  
1 room.



*The new road encourages  
travel and community*

*The Presbyterian Church housed the  
Okanagan Centre School from  
1911-1932.*

