County of Inverness

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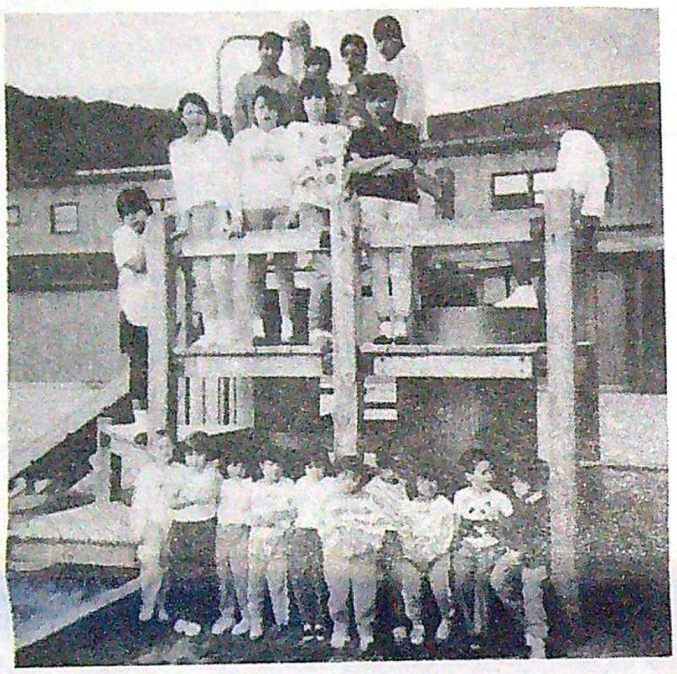
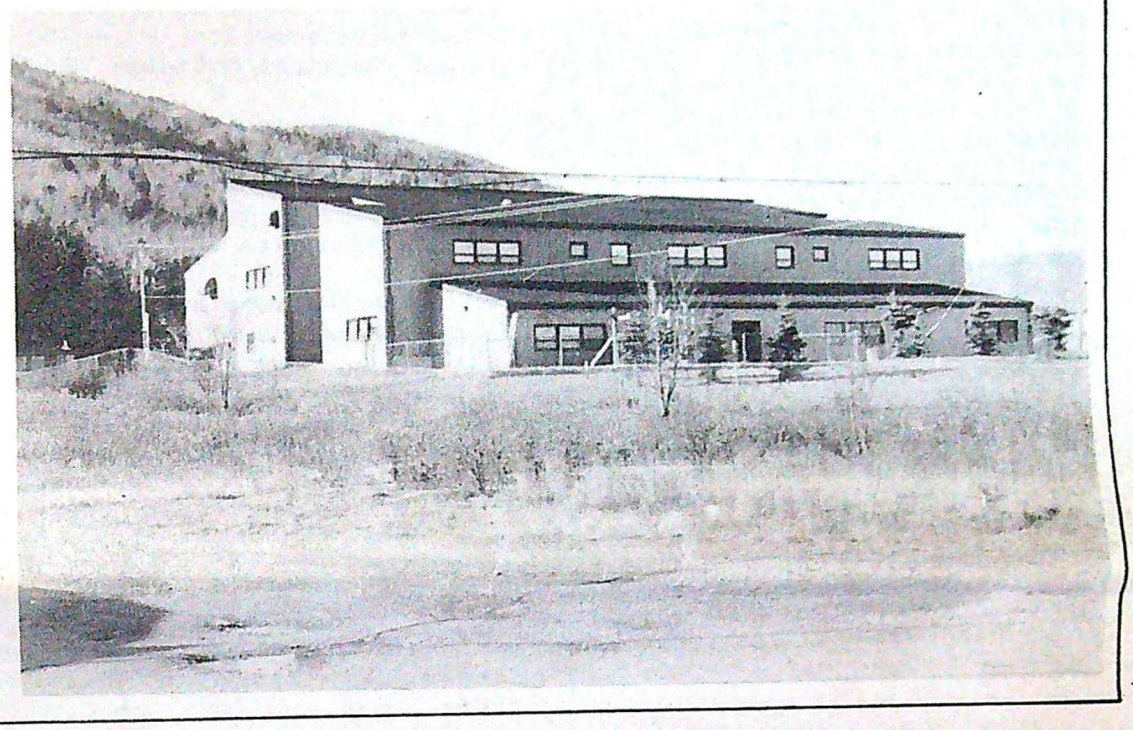




The Whycocomagh Federal School

The eighth anniversary

A place to be proud

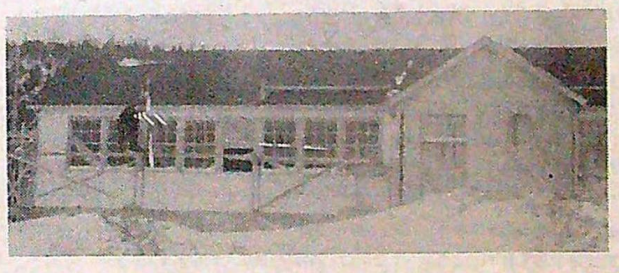
by Mary Anne Ducharme

Eight years ago, on September 18th, was the Grand Opening of the Whycocomagh Federal School serving the Whycocomagh Reserve. At the time the Reserve consisted of 425 Band Members under Chief Ryan C. Googoo who was an agressive advocate for people of the Reserve. A good working relationship with the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs, a strong base of leadership on the Reserve, and good timing all contributed to the school construction project which was largely carried out by people of the Reserve, with Bernie Sylliboy as foreman. Michael MacLeod, Principal for the past ten years at the Federal School speaks of the intense pride taken in this school, a pride that has not diminished since 1980.

Before the present school, students on the reserve attended a wood frame school which was inadequate for the needs of the student population, and grades 7 and 8 had to housed in another building, and two portable classrooms were also in use. Being scattered in three buildings, having no access to a gym, industrial arts facilities, or home economics was seen as a serious handicap to educational opportunities on a par with the provincial school systems.

When the new school opened, new staff was hired, including specialists in physical education, home economics, and industrial arts, as well as three provincially certified Native teachers, and three teacher aids from the Reserve. MacLeod recognizes the importance of Native teachers in the system, because most students enter the school with no English, or with English as a second language.

"The language arts program is an area that in stressed in our curriculum," says the principal. " We give English instruction a supplementary push because it is the philosophy of of this Band Council to prepare our children for the 'outside' or mainstream world. This is important



because our students attend provincial schools from grade 10 to graduation. Of course, we want as many as possible to go on to university as well, and to be able to get jobs." He explained how Whycocomagh Reserve students in the provincial schools have support from the Reserve in the person of Guidance Councilor Alan Bernard, and through tutoring and study sessions in the evenings.

PICTURES:
Top left: the first class to attend the new Reserve School in 1980, and the new Primary class of '88.

Top right: The Federal School as it appears today.

Above: the former Reserve School as it was still under construction.

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Viewpoint

God bless ECRL, even though you're far away

IF YOU DON'T LOVE TO READ, THIS COLUMN WILL BE OF NO INTEREST TO YOU WHATSOEVER.

by Mary Anne Ducharme

I've always had a passion for reading, and to me there is nothing more satisfying than curling up in a favorite chair, and becomming totally absorbed in a good book. I regard typefaces like others regard fine art-- print fonts have poetic names like Zapf Chancery or Palatino or Helvetica, and I am perfectly capable of admiring a page in a magazine or book for pure esthetics. However, when I am actually reading, I am not aware of the print at all--it's like a movie unreeling in my head, in full color and wide screen. In my typical reading mode, if World War III, the final Armagedden, destroyed civilization as we know it, I may not notice. I am in a kind of time-and-space warp. When I first read ROOTS, my family was unable to make contact with me for three days. When I read WATERSHIP DOWN, I developed this unreasoning fear of dogs and looked at the little creatures in our rabbit hutch with awakened eyes. I like some of James Michener's work, but he sends his readers back into the reaches of the prehistoric, gets them to care very much about the affairs of a cave man and his beloved, then he sends the helpless reader, with callous disregard for human vertigo, into a series of time warps that clips through a thousand years in five paragraphs. When I emerge from his books, it takes me a week to get used to normal earth time--a kind of jet lag.

My family has stopped trying to make me feel guilty about these trips to outer space. I am hopelessly addicted to reading and have no desire to quit the habit. Being readers themselves, they realize that reading is not mere escape; reading lends a fresh perspective, a deeper richness and understanding to present reality.

Needless to say, I also love libraries. For most of my life I could take a 15 minute spin in the car to one of several libraries, or I could walk-- (with some risk of getting a hernia from the big stack I was either taking out or returning.) I loved looking at the shelves of books, exploring subjects that I didn't know existed, letting serendipity lead me where it would. How else could you discover an author you never heard of before? How else could you learn things totally outside of your present awareness? I learned early about the uses of the card catalogue for purposes of research, but it was also exciting just to be an armchair explorer. There's a whole universe out there--(pivoting, of course, around Cape Breton Island).

Not having a library nearby now is a constant frustration for me. I have read everything in my personal library at least three times, and if I buy too many more books, we'll have to move out to make room. I wish somebody with the time and inclination would open up a used book store somewhere in the County-- you know, one of those buy-sell-trade places with shelves and boxes of books from floor to ceiling, all cheaply priced.
I'll be the first customer.

As it is, I have to travel over one hundred miles round trip to visit the nearest public library or bookstore. I am not pleased with this arrangement, at all. I hate it.

I do not understand why all those other book fiends out there (there must be some!?) are not clamoring for a municipal library, or at least several village libraries. Some of those empty schools uselessly dotting the landscape could be put to good use as libraries. I would hazard a guess that there are a few people like myself who would donate books for a "seed library."

Generations of rural children are growing up virtually bookless. Most of them have no idea what they are missing, as compared to their urban cousins-- which is saddest of all. And the school libraries are not public libraries. They are not open in the evenings, on Saturdays, in the summer. And most school libraries are woefully lacking in just about everything a library should have. I have even heard accounts in which students were not allowed to be in the library because there was no one to act as librarian, or even supervisor.

God bless the bookmobile, the lifeline for uncounted starving masses who are languishing for want of the printed word, (no aspersion to local newspapers). But however dedicated the bookmobile staff, however willing to go the extra miles, however willing to search out books -- a bookmobile is not a library. It is not there when you want to know something particular right now, today; when you finished your book and want another by the same author to read this weekend; when you need someone to help you conduct serious and sustained research; when you want access to rare archival material; when you would like to bring your child to a story hour; when you'd just like to sit in a quiet place and spend pleasant leisure hours exploring lost cities of the Incas, or learning how to find the constellation Delphinus in the northern sky. I think it is an inalienable human right to have access to a library building within the range of a reasonable drive, so that no cruel trick of Old Man Winter can keep you hostage for days on end.

God bless the Eastern Counties Regional Library. The staff there have helped me so many times, in a manner above and beyond the call of duty.

They have searched the length and breadth of Canadian library holdings for me to find the particular information I was looking for. A mere phone call brings those wonderfull padded envelopes to my house. When I went recently to the library building in Mulgrave, stacks of books I wanted to look at were ready at a table. ECRL deserves the highest praise, for it is staffed with the most delightfully helpful people. They should be candidates for Olympic gold medals.

But Mulgrave is so darn far away.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ILLITERACY

The Research Report, "LITERACY IN CANADA gives us the following statistics about illiteracy:

-4-1/2 million Canadians are affected by their difficulties with print. The research pointed out that 8% of adults in Canada are basically illiterate (they can barely read and write), 16% are functionally illiterate (their skills are not sufficient to get by in everyday life), and 9% are only marginally literate.

-The main factor for not finishing high school is lack of motivation.

-People who are illiterate earn only two-thirds the income of literate Canadians.

-75% of illiterates feel that reading and writing do not affect employment. Only 10% are taking or planning to take courses in reading and writing.

-Illiteracy in Canada costs businesses about $4 billion or more each year.

-Illiteracy costs Canadian society about $10 billion or more each year.

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