

**A Thread Through History:
The story of three schools and the Threads Guild building (PART ONE)
by Rita Moir, February 2022**

The history of the Threads Guild tells the story of three different buildings, all part of a community history spanning more than a century. From its early days of readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, the school also served as a hall where community alliances and divisions, arson, agriculture, and arts made their mark. The story of the three schools and their place in Slocan Valley history veers from heart-warming to shocking and back again.

The original Perry Siding (or Perry's Siding) School was built in 1908.



Perry Siding School circa 1915. Hufty family collection photo from *The Third Crop*. The school served for about 13 years. Many of the family names of children here and in news clippings of the time are still familiar today.

That earliest building, as small as it looked – and it did get an addition in 1914 – served as a school, but also as a meeting place (in fact the headquarters) for the local Farmer's Institute, for the Presbyterian minister's sermons, St. Patrick's Day Celebrations, games days and lectures on agricultural topics such as apple disease. After a long meeting, 100 people might visit and dance late into the night before heading home by sleigh on snowy roads, back to farms in an era when John Graham sold rich bottom land \$250 an acre and R.D. Kennedy sold young pigs for \$5.

(Special to The Daily News.)

PERRY SIDING, B. C., July 2.—On Thursday afternoon was held the semi-annual examination of the children at **Perry Siding school**. There was a good attendance of parents and others, who seemed greatly interested in the bright display made by the children. The teacher, Miss Lift, deserves congratulation on the evident progress made during the half-year she has had charge.

The examination was followed by sports and games, which were greatly enjoyed by both children and grown-ups, and everyone did justice to the supper served in the schoolhouse. Luckily, the weather was fair, and the gathering broke up between 7 and 8 o'clock with the evident reluctance

of the children, who had had a splendid time.

Flat race for boys—1, R. Kennedy; 2, John Avis. Flat race for girls—1, Mary Avis; 2, Gladys Worth. Flat race for kiddies—1, Harold Avis; 2, Olge Iscobsen. Three-legged race—John Avis and Robert Kennedy; 2, Clara Graham and Freda Dawney. Egg and spoon race—first heat, 1, Clara Graham; 2, Freda Dawney. Second heat—1, R. Kennedy; 2, Bertha Dawney. Sack race—first heat, 1, Gladys Worth. Second heat—1, Mary Avis. Ladies' sack race—1, Mrs. Graham; 2, Miss Lift. Thread needle race for boys—1, Robert Kennedy. Nail and hammer—children's heat, 1, Clara Graham. Girls' heat, 1, Bertha Dawney. Ladies' heat, 1, Mrs. Kennedy. Ladies' race—1, Mrs. Graham; 2, Miss Lift; 3, Miss Chapman. In the tug-of-war the side captained by Gladys Worth won.

(Special to The Daily News.)

PERRY SIDING, B. C., March 23.—The people of **Perry Siding** held an "Irish at home" on St. Patrick's day, which was celebrated in a most pleasing manner by the people of the **Perry Siding** settlement. When, shortly after 7 o'clock, the people arrived at the **school** they were pleasantly surprised to find the room beautifully decorated, the walls bearing such mottoes as "Ireland Forever" and "God Bless Ireland" skillfully worked out in green and white. This work was done by Mrs. Denny, assisted by J. and W. Nixon and J. Greenwood. The evening was spent in music and games. The children greatly enjoyed a game of blind man's buff, led by Mrs. Denny. Mr. and Mrs. H. Nixon furnished a treat by singing some beautiful old Irish songs in a most delightful manner. The Misses D. and E. Greenwood sang "The Minstrel Boy" in a manner to please every one, while Mrs. Denny completely captivated her hearers by the manner in which she sang several old Irish songs and ballads.

At 10 o'clock a splendid lunch was served, to which the people did justice. At the close Mr. Nixon, in behalf of the people, tendered a vote of thanks to Mrs. Denny for her kindness in planning to give them such a pleasant evening. The party broke up at 11:30 p. m. Every one expressed great pleasure at the way the evening had been spent.

March 24, 1911
The Daily News

PERRY SIDING SCHOOL CONCERT IS HELD

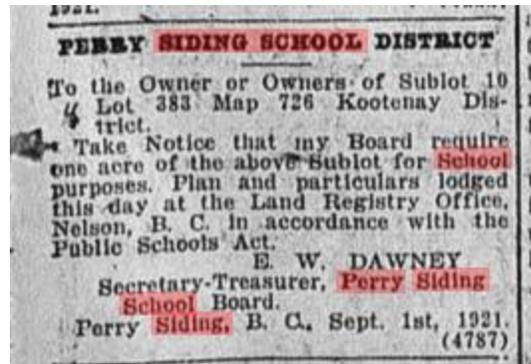
(Special to the Daily News)

PERRY SIDING, B. C., Dec. 26.—On Thursday evening, Dec. 19, an entertainment was given in the **school** house at **Perry Siding** by the pupils, ably assisted by Miss F. Danney and F. Potts, and all the various items were well rendered and reflected great credit on the teacher Miss Tapanille, for the pains taken in training them. After the entertainment refreshments were served by the women of the district and then dancing commenced and was thoroughly enjoyed by all and was kept up until the early hours of the morning.

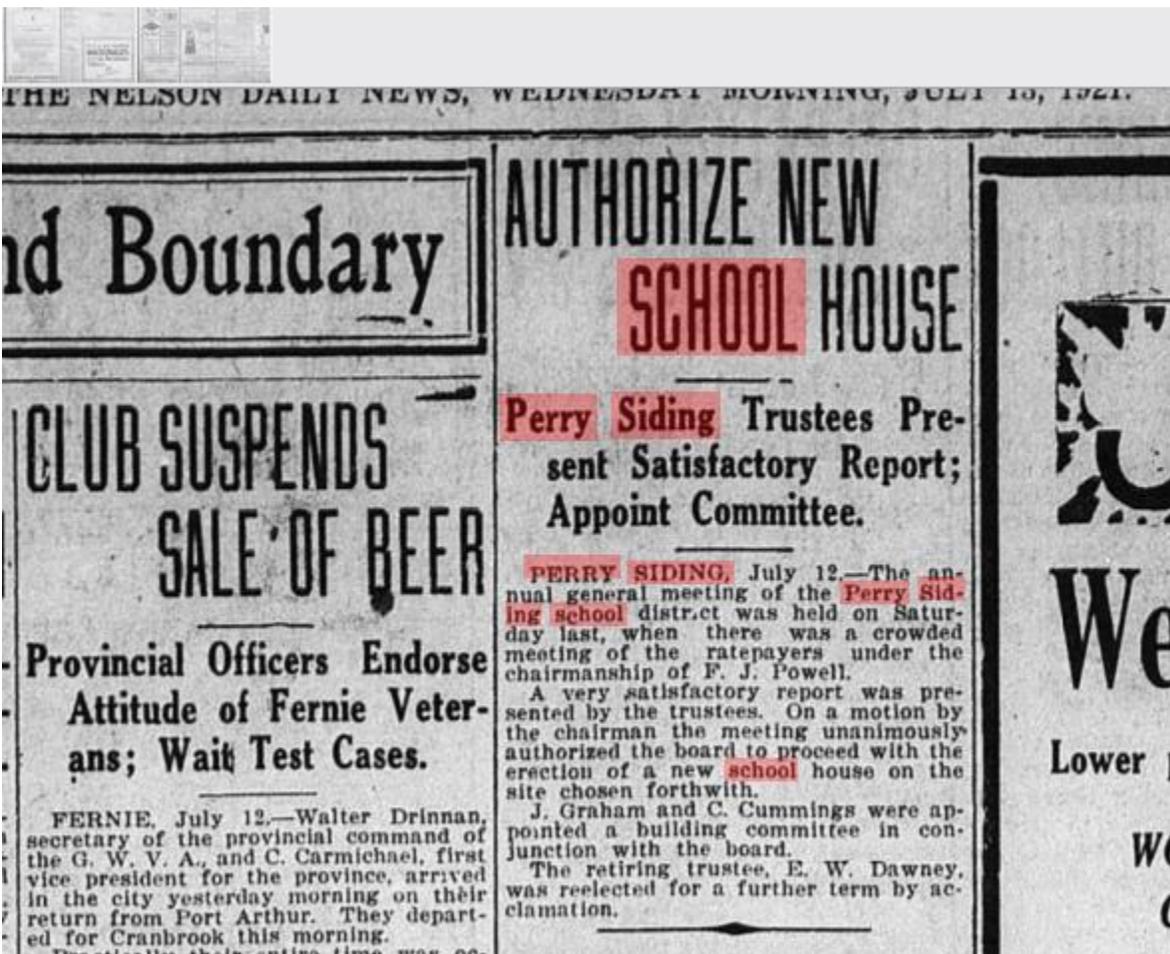
Dec. 27, 1918 The Daily News

Articles report celebrations of “The Empire” as a major part of school and community events, with games, song and speeches; women from the district were instrumental in the organizational work.

It’s unclear why this original school was replaced. But in 1921 the school board advertised for land to build a new one. The lot description in the clipping to the right – where the second school would be built – is the same as that of the current Threads Guild.



This 1921 lot description is for the land the current Threads Guild is built upon.



Ad and story from The Daily News 1921.



Builder John Avis always did handstands atop his construction projects. This picture is of the second Perry Siding School. This photo was likely taken in 1922, though it was misdated in *The Third Crop* as 1937.

And, as with the first Perry's School, this one served both students and the larger community as a home for meetings, celebrations and dances, with the exuberant reportage that it was "without exception the finest building in the valley." At the grand opening in 1922, 150 people sang, danced, and enjoyed ginger beer and ice cream until the wee hours of 3 a.m.

Nelson Daily News, 9 Sept 1922

SOCIAL CLUB ENJOYS DANCE

Opening of New School at Perry's Siding Scene of Great Frivolity

PERRYS SIDING, Sept. 6.—The Perrys Social club gave a very successful dance in the new school house to celebrate its completion on Friday, September 1. This building, which has been a long felt want, is a great asset to the district and it is without exception the finest building in the valley and does great credit to the designers and builders. In order to expedite the completion the residents turned out in force and have been working feverishly for the last two weeks. It is only fair to say that they gave their services free. There is also great praise due to the chairman of the board for the time, work and interest he has given in supervising the building.

Owing to the unavoidable absence of the honorary president of the club, W. Hunter, Esq., M. P. P., the ceremony of opening was somewhat curtailed, this duty devolving on the president, F. J. Powell.

The singing of the "Maple Leaf" by all standing started the proceedings, after which the dancing became fast and furious. During the evening the secretary addressed a few remarks to the gathering and a splendid supper was served by the club committee, which was much enjoyed. Ice cream and ginger beer were also in evidence.

The club orchestra performed prodigies in the matter of supplying the music, and D. F. Peters of Appledale kindly relieved the orchestra on occasion, accompanied by Mrs. Gray. An enjoyable interval occurred when Mrs. Kirby Grenfell, a visitor at Appledale, rendered two songs. The guests numbered over 150, cars coming from Nelson, Slocan, Vallican and Appledale.

The gathering broke up at about 3 a. m., everybody declaring they had spent a most enjoyable time and congratulating Perry Siding on their possession of such a splendid school house.

The school teacher received just over \$1,000 per year, and taught 25 students. Most, if not all, teachers were female, but ads starting in 1930 gave preference to male applicants.

TEACHERS WANTED (13)
TEACHER FOR PERRY SIDING
School; male teacher preferred.
Address Sam Bentley, Sec'y., Per-
ry Siding, B. C. (938)
WANTED MALE TEACHER ALICE

July 10, 1930 The Daily News

Address Correspondence to
 TEACHERS' BUREAU,
 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, VICTORIA, B.C.


 THE GOVERNMENT OF
 THE PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

SCHOOL DISTRICT INFORMATION FORM

Name of school *Perry Siding*

School district *Perry Siding*

Nearest railway station or boat landing *Perry*

Distance of railway station or boat landing from school *Within five minutes' walk.*

Boarding and lodging facilities for teacher *Limited.*

Cost of board and lodging *\$40 per month.*

General living conditions of district *Fair.*

Present salary paid to teacher *\$1080 per annum.*

No. of children of school age in district *25* No. enrolled *25* Average attendance *18.9 (Feb.)*

No. of divisions in school *Eight.*

Chief industry of district *Mixed Farming.*

Character of country *Mountainous.*

Climatic conditions *Mean Temp. -45°. Precipitation 28.40 per annum.*

Condition of school building and grounds *New and rough.*

Does Board engage a janitor for school? *Yes.*

If possible enclose herewith a snapshot of the school building.

Additional remarks

Date *March 8, 1923.* (Signed) *(Miss) Bessie Robertson.*





Photo from BC Archives 1923. The completed schoolhouse that lasted from Sept., 1922 to April, 1937.

This second school, “without exception the finest building in the valley,” just 15 years old, burned to the ground in 1937. It, like 10 other halls and community schools, including Appledale and Winlaw, was victim to a wave of arsons throughout the Kootenays. It was a year of incredible tension, divisions, hatred and terror that affected all the people in our valley and the entire area.



April 9, 1937 Nelson Daily News

The Sons of Freedom sect, who strenuously objected to registration of marriages, militarism in schooling, conscription, paying taxes and many other government regulations, was blamed and the atmosphere of the Kootenays grew violent and racist. The entire Doukhobor community, no matter what faction they identified with – mainstream or radical – took the brunt. An afternoon in the Touchstones Archives in Nelson, reading the papers in April 1937, reveals the fear, the huge community meetings, the repercussions. The Winlaw Farmers' Institute – which traditionally headquartered in the Perry Siding School – called for boycotts of all Doukhobor farm produce, for the segregation of all Doukhobors, and for them to be put on reservations. The paper's letters columns were full of hatred and racism and fear. It wasn't only the Sons of Freedom who were targeted, but all Doukhobors. Doukhobor children were turned away from school; armed men patrolled local roads at night in the Perry's area, and Doukhobors were subject to random beatings. The letters columns were rife with calls for their expulsion from Canada, along with the deportation of local Chinese people, and for the return of "white" rights. It was a sickening time of our history, and the furor only died down during massive local and international celebrations of the British Empire, the coronation of King George VI and then coverage of the marriage of Wallis Simpson and the Duke of Windsor.

In this aftermath of the arsons, schools and halls were rebuilt. Local newspapers have yet to be digitized past 1936, so it's difficult to learn when the third Perry Siding School (now the Threads Guild) was built. A new Castlegar hall was going up in April of 1937, so it's quite possible Perry's was rebuilt at the same time.

Again, in 1953, Perry's was a scene of unrest, with Freedomites encamped on land adjacent to the school, and with nude protests visible to all. 144 people were arrested and 103 Freedomite children were taken into custody and shipped to New Denver. Thus began the forced and traumatic removal of children from their homes, protest treks to Vancouver, and years of family separation and enforced education that made the news worldwide.

Sometimes in the midst of our daily lives, we forget our history...and so this time of turmoil – all around the Perry's Schoolhouse – recedes. While our story grows more settled, the history remains the backdrop of who we are today.