

# Little School on the Prairie: School District Records at the Provincial Archives of Alberta



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**RÉSUMÉ** Ce texte présente des sujets liés aux documents de districts scolaires qui sont conservés aux Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA). La première partie examine les façons dont la législation provinciale a créé les districts scolaires et modifié leur administration et leur gouvernance. La deuxième partie explore la façon dont ces changements ont eu une incidence sur les personnes qui ont versé des documents des districts scolaires aux PAA, ainsi que sur le genre de documents inclus dans ces versements. Enfin, ce texte fait l'analyse de la loi provinciale sur la *Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy* [Liberté de l'information et protection et vie privée] et montre comment cette législation gouverne l'accès aux documents des districts scolaires qui sont conservés aux PAA. En fin de compte, ce texte encourage les archivistes à se renseigner au sujet de cette législation et à diffuser cette information à leur clientèle, afin d'améliorer la satisfaction de ceux qui fréquentent les archives.

**ABSTRACT** This paper explores topics pertaining to school district records held at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA). The first section discusses how provincial legislation created school districts, and modified the administration and governance of school districts. The second section examines the way in which these changes to the administration and governance influenced who donated school district records to the PAA and what kinds of records are included in these acquisitions. Lastly the paper analyzes how provincial *Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy* legislation governs access to school district records at the PAA. Ultimately, the paper urges archivists to educate themselves and their patrons about legislation to improve patron satisfaction.

School district records constitute one of the most frequently consulted types of records at the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA). Users examine school district records for a variety of reasons: to obtain genealogical information, to verify identities for passport applications, and to study the educational history of Alberta. While conducting research with school district records, users may consult any number of common types of records such as tax and assessment rolls, correspondence, forms, applications, certificates, financial statements, maps, and plans. However, school district records include records unique to the operation of a school district such as daily registers. Researchers regularly request, and search for, daily registers because they contain information that may help locate a family member within a genealogical puzzle; registers include the birth date and address with the legal land description of the students who attended the school. A register may also supply information relevant to other areas of study such as agriculture, or health and medicine. For example, a poorly attended month may reflect a period of high agricultural activity or disease among students.<sup>1</sup>

School district records are scattered throughout archival repositories in Alberta, though the PAA and the Glenbow Museum and Archives hold the majority of them. The dissemination of school district records has occurred most significantly because the Government of Alberta did not pass legislation regulating the transfer of records created by school districts to a centralized record-keeping body, such as the PAA.<sup>2</sup>

Researchers can search for school district records in several ways: they can inquire in person to the reference room of any archives, or they can use tools available on-line. For example, the Glenbow operates a database that allows users to search for the name, location, and opening dates of school districts in Alberta; the PAA maintains an information management system that allows users to search for school district records on-line; and most archival institutions in Alberta contribute archival descriptions to the Archives

- 1 It is difficult to provide a linear measurement of school district records at the PAA. Like most archival institutions, the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) possesses a backlog of records yet to be described, and in particular, a backlog of accessions that may have been inventoried or indexed, but fail to meet the *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD) standard. Currently, the PAA is in the midst of a retroactive description project that will result in fully described holdings, including school district records, with the descriptions available on-line. As a result, it is currently impossible to provide more than an approximate measurement of school district records. It would be fair, however, to estimate that the PAA holds hundreds, if not thousands, of metres of school district records with more arriving monthly from various donors.
- 2 The PAA also holds thousands of metres of education records: records generated by the Department of Education in concert with its duties of administering and governing school districts and school divisions. Education records arrive at the PAA via a Government of Alberta records schedule, which ensures that the Government's role in the operation of school districts is preserved.

Network of Alberta database, which allows users to search for school district records held anywhere in the province.

Many users come to the PAA with some knowledge of the educational history of Alberta. Users glean this knowledge from reference sources that employ a variety of resources to inform their histories. Some publications, such as Eric J. Hanson's enduring *Local Government in Alberta*, trace provincial legislation to illustrate that school districts represent the first form of local government in Alberta. William Peter Baergen's *Pioneering with a Piece of Chalk: The One-Room Schools of Alberta 1885–1982*, uses reminiscences from former students and residents of the district, school district records, and legislation to provide dates of establishment and closure for the over 4600 school districts created in the North-West Territories and later the Province of Alberta. Other sources, such as John C. Charyk's *Little White School House* series, use personal experiences to narrate their histories of rural education in Alberta.<sup>3</sup> Many local historians and genealogists have also created websites devoted to school districts. These websites often call upon former students of the school districts to help provide information for the sites.<sup>4</sup> However, despite consulting secondary sources before arriving at the PAA, some users remain unprepared in one significant area pertaining to school district records: access. Users visiting the PAA reading room may be surprised to find that since 1998, select school district records have been subject to Alberta's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP).<sup>5</sup>

This paper is written to share with the archival community the PAA's experience with school district records. School records can be found in the holdings of many archival institutions across Canada, and the discussion here may prompt a greater analysis of the records so valued by users. The first section will provide a brief history of school districts in Alberta, focusing on legislation relevant to the creation and development of school district administration and governance. The second section will discuss donors, and explain how and why school district records arrive at the PAA. The final section will examine access conditions with particular reference to FOIP legislation and examples from the PAA in order to articulate what kinds of records the PAA must restrict and why.

3 John C. Charyk, *The Little White School House* (Saskatoon, 1968); Eric J. Hanson, *Local Government in Alberta* (Toronto, 1956); William Peter Baergen, *Pioneering with a Piece of Chalk: The One-Room Country Schools of Alberta 1885–1982* (Stettler, 2005).

4 See Gen Web, a local history site dedicated to genealogy in Alberta. This address links to the school district portion of the site: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~canab/schools/schools.html> (accessed on 24 July 2008).

5 As a private institution, the Glenbow Museum and Archives is not subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Municipal archives, where some school district records are held, fall under the jurisdiction of FOIP.

### School District Administration and Governance

The emergence of school districts in the North-West Territories (including what later became the province of Alberta) demonstrated that by 1884, the year the North-West Territorial Council passed the *School Ordinance*, the Territories had made enormous strides toward settlement since passage of the *Dominion Lands Act* in 1872.<sup>6</sup> Homesteaders could yield sufficient funds to finance school districts, enough children populated the Territories to necessitate the creation of schools, and most importantly, communities had moved beyond subsistence living, and could now consider matters less vital to their physical survival, such as the education of their children.<sup>7</sup>

Establishing a school district required the active participation and the involvement of the community as well as approval from the Territorial Council. According to section 13 of the *School Ordinance*, to form a school district, a committee of three ratepayers, whose taxes would then fund the school district, were required to petition the Territorial Council. If the Council accepted the request, it provided a map documenting the official boundaries of the school district, and either approved building plans or offered recommendations for the construction of a schoolhouse.<sup>8</sup> Some of the first school districts established in the Territories included Fort Macleod No. 47 in Township 9 (1885), Edmonton No. 7 in Township 53 (1885), and Gleichen No. 103 in Township 22 (1887).

Many of the provisions found in the *School Ordinance* suggest that the Council anticipated the physical challenges communities would face when operating and attending a rural school district. Section 10 ordered that a school district could not encompass more than thirty-six square miles and must comprise at least four heads of families with at least ten children between the ages of five and sixteen attending the school.<sup>9</sup> These stipulations ultimately benefited the community: a smaller area between districts ensured that children did not need to travel great distances to attend school and that enough ratepayers resided in the district to financially support the community's school.

Communities also helped name school districts. While school districts

6 The *Dominion Lands Act* allowed heads of a family to apply for a homestead. According to the Act, if the applicant lived in a permanent dwelling and had cultivated the land after a period of three years, the applicant owned the land.

7 In 1905, Alberta's inaugural year, parts of the North-West Territories became the Province of Alberta, and a Department of Education of the newly formed province assumed responsibility for education.

8 George H. Buck, "Alberta's School Building Plans," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989–90), p. 175.

9 The required number of children to attend school districts changed as various amendments were made to the *School Ordinance*, and later the *School Act*.

received their official names after obtaining approval from the Territorial Council, the Council first solicited recommendations from the community. Often communities named school districts in honour of notable settlers. For example Plamondon School District No. 2696, established in 1913, was named in honour of one of its first settlers, Joseph Plamondon.<sup>10</sup> In other instances, communities named schools after titled individuals such as Harewood School District No. 4112, named after the Earl of Harewood.<sup>11</sup> Schools also derived their names from prominent topographical features of the region such as Twin Spruce School District No. 4864, named for two spruce trees located on the school grounds.<sup>12</sup>

School districts received their numerical designation from the Territorial Council according to their date of creation. The first school district established within the Territorial Council's boundaries, Moose Jaw School District, received the numerical designation "1."<sup>13</sup> After Saskatchewan and Alberta entered into Confederation in 1905, Saskatchewan provided its school districts with new numerical designations, while Alberta continued from the last number the Council had issued. The Council, and beginning in 1905, the Department of Education of the Government of Alberta, occasionally reissued names to school districts if a school closed or dissolved for a brief period. For example, school districts located in different parts of the province might share the same name such as Rocky Ridge School District No. 4783 located in Township 25 and Rocky Ridge School District No. 4919 located in Township 32, or Warren School District No. 3265 in Township 65 and Warren School District No. 2910 in Township 39.

The *School Ordinance* enabled the community and government to collaborate in the administration and governance of the school. The Council determined the curricula for school districts, certified the standards and certifications of teachers, and sent inspectors to assess school districts, while the community managed other aspects of operating the school district.<sup>14</sup> For example, three elected members of the community known as school trustees, collectively known as a school board, managed the day-to-day administra-

10 The district was located at Section 2, Township 68, Range 16, West of the 4th Meridian. Joseph Plamondon arrived in Alberta in 1908 from a Québécois settlement in Alberta. For more information on Joseph Plamondon see the Plamondon Museum in Plamondon, Alberta. Land descriptions in this paper are provided according to the Alberta Township System.

11 See Harewood House, <http://www.harewood.org/> (accessed on 9 July 2008) for more information on the Earl of Harewood.

12 Baergen, p. 543.

13 Betty Robinson and Mary Tollestrup, "Names and Numbers of School Districts," <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/mtoll/ruralscd.htm> (accessed on 24 July 2008).

14 *School Ordinance*, 1884, No. 5, s. 3.

tion of the school district.<sup>15</sup> The school board hired teachers, bought and purchased materials to operate the school district, disciplined teachers and students, and kept the records of the school district.

Section 65 of the *School Ordinance* also empowered school boards with the authority to manage the finances of the school and gather taxes directly from the ratepayers of their district. The legislation included this necessary provision to accommodate conditions regarding the establishment of local government areas. While the *Municipal Ordinance* of 1883 provided terms for the creation of local government areas, such as local improvement districts or municipal districts, only a handful of local government areas existed by 1885, while fifty-nine school districts already operated in the Territories.<sup>16</sup> As a result, many school districts did not fall under the jurisdiction or share coterminous boundaries with a local government area.<sup>17</sup>

These non-coterminous boundaries created separate tax areas for both local government areas and school districts, resulting in a unique tax history for each school district. If a school district operated in an area where a municipality had not formed, the school district collected its own taxes. However, if the school district amalgamated with a municipality, the municipality collected taxes on behalf of the school district. If a school district formed within the boundaries of a municipality, the municipality collected taxes for the school district. If a school district operated within the boundaries of several municipalities, all the municipalities contributed money to the school district.<sup>18</sup>

In 1913, amendments to the *School Ordinance* brought changes to the administration, as well as improved financial stability, for school districts. Section 40 of *An Act to Amend the School Ordinance, the School Assessment Ordinance, and the School Grants Ordinance* allowed the boards of school districts of a particular region to unite and share resources between the various districts within a consolidated area. Under the terms of consolidation, one school board worked on behalf of all of the school districts included in those consolidated.

Under consolidation, school districts not only shared the resources that

15 *School Ordinance*, 1884, No. 5, s. 65.

16 Walter Walchuk, *Alberta's Local Governments: People in Communities Seeking Goodness* (Alberta, 1987), p. 23.

17 In 1883, the North-West Territorial Council passed the *Municipal Ordinance*, allowing for the establishment of local government. In response to this ordinance, many townships, typically comprised of thirty-six sections of land, organized to form herd districts (1883), fire districts (1886), and statute labour districts (1887). In 1897, all three ordinances amalgamated with the passing of the *Local Improvement Ordinance*. Local improvement districts maintained public works such as road building, and the management of fires, noxious fumes, and animals.

18 *School Ordinance*, 1884, No. 5, s. 97–101.

the board provided, but also the monetary resources generated by a wider tax base drawn from residents living within the consolidated boundary.<sup>19</sup> A wider tax base essentially subsidized those school districts of Alberta with poorer agricultural resources; a larger number of ratepayers contributing to the operation of a school district improved the financial stability of a school. A school district that prior to consolidation could not pay its teachers and faced closure could now share its neighbour's wealth. Ultimately, a rural landowner's ability to pay taxes directly related to the success of his crop; if a landowner suffered a poor crop, he would be unable to pay taxes. Essentially, in the early years of education in Alberta, a school district's financial success was directly related to the agrarian success of the region.

Financial stability guaranteed that children received better educational tools: school boards could purchase more supplies and pay their teachers. If a school board failed to collect enough taxes, the consequences created detrimental results for the school. School boards suffering from financial difficulties could not offer teachers salaries large enough to entice them to more rural regions, nor could the board hire the best-qualified teachers. The board might only be able to hire a teacher with a Third Class, Provisional Certificate, rather than a teacher with a First Class Certificate. A teacher with a First Class Certificate had attended Normal School and had finished Grade 12, whereas a teacher with a Third Class Provisional Certificate had finished Grade 11, had not attended Normal School, and could only teach on a yearly permit. Some school districts spent several terms without teachers, and in some cases, teachers also went without pay.<sup>20</sup>

After the passing of *An Act to Amend the School Ordinance, the School Assessment Ordinance, and the School Grants Ordinance*, the Government of Alberta passed the *Act to Provide Relief to School Districts* in 1914 to further aid floundering school districts. The Act allowed school districts to apply for financial grants from the government. However, to receive financial assistance, school districts had to fulfill various requirements for attendance and examination results.<sup>21</sup>

19 *An Act to Amend the School Ordinance, the School Assessment Ordinance, and the School Grants Ordinance*, Statutes of Alberta [hereafter SA] 1913, c. 19, s. 4.

20 Baergen, p. 21. The level of teacher certification that a school district could assure also affected the grant money provided to the school. A First Class certificate qualified a school district to receive \$350.00 in grant money while a Third Class certificate would result only in a grant of \$250.00 to pay the teacher. Normal Schools provided provisional training for teachers across the Prairies. The first Normal School opened in Calgary in 1906; see the Calgary Normal School Fonds at the Glenbow Museum and Archives in Calgary.

21 *Act to Provide Relief to School Districts*, SA 1913, c. 11. Previous legislation had also allowed school districts to borrow money from an incorporated municipality within the school district boundaries. See *An Act to Amend the School Ordinance, the School Assessment Ordinance, and the School Grants Ordinance*, SA 1913, c. 19, s. 18.

The next major change to the administration and governance of school districts occurred with the passing of *An Act to Amend the School Act* in 1936, which amended the 1922 *School Act*; until 1922, Alberta school districts had continued to operate under the provisions and amendments made to the *School Ordinance*. Section 231 of the 1936 Act allowed for the establishment of school divisions.<sup>22</sup> Legislation ensured that these divisions would operate in much the same way as consolidated school districts; one board of trustees managed the school division rather than separate boards, and more ratepayers contributed to the financial operation of the school. The first school division, Berry Creek No. 1, was formed in Alberta in 1936. Over the next thirty years, sixty-two more school divisions formed in Alberta to administer schools districts.

The passing of the *County Act* in 1950 also modified the administration and governance of school districts. Under the *County Act*, local government areas, such as municipal districts, could amalgamate and form new local government bodies known as counties. The *County Act* dissolved school divisions located within the boundaries of the new county, and the county absorbed all assets and liabilities of the division. A new administrative body known as the School Council would manage the operation of all school districts within the boundaries of the county.<sup>23</sup>

The Act also altered the system of taxation for school districts through the consolidation of school districts and school divisions. While previous legislation had allowed school districts and school divisions to set their own rates of taxation and collect taxes directly from ratepayers, the Act placed responsibility for taxation in the hands of the county. This adjustment to the taxation system related directly to the work of the Coterminous Boundaries Commission in 1952.<sup>24</sup>

To determine a county's boundaries, the Commission considered the physical features of a proposed area of land as well as the area's industry, its ability to pay taxes, its schools, its hospitals, its transportation, and its proximity to municipal hubs. The Commission used the results of the survey to determine the boundaries of the counties in an attempt to create an equalized division of land with no one area more prosperous than the other.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, with coterminous boundaries in place, counties could maintain more efficient administrative control over school districts.

For over fifty years, the Government of Alberta did not pass any legislation that greatly altered the administration and governance of school

22 *An Act to Amend the School Act*, SA 1936, c. 85, s. 231.

23 *County Act*, SA 1950, c. 15, s. 4.

24 While the *County Act* (1950) preceded the work of the Commission, many counties in Alberta did not form until after the Commission completed its work in 1955.

25 Jack Masson, *Alberta's Local Government and Their Politics* (Edmonton, 1985), p. 93.

districts. However, the 1990s saw the merger and creation of numerous school divisions throughout Alberta. Amendments made to the *School Act* in 1993 allowed school divisions to establish regional school divisions with a single regional board administering the division.<sup>26</sup> In some cases these regional divisions were formed from schools outside of the jurisdiction of a county. For example, in 1995, Berry Creek School Division No. 1, Neutral Hills School Division No. 17, Rangeland School Division No. 9, and Starland School Division No. 30 formed Prairie Land Regional Division.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, school divisions operated by counties left the counties to form separate school divisions; for example, in 1995 the schools of the County of Lethbridge No. 26 and the County of Vulcan No. 2 merged to form Palliser Regional Schools.<sup>28</sup>

### **Donors, and How and Why School District Records Arrive at the PAA**

Acquisitions from local government comprise some of the largest deposits of school district records at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. These deposits began arriving at the PAA not long after it started accepting private acquisitions in 1964. In the 1960s, the PAA initiated a program to solicit local government bodies, in particular counties, for records. Many counties took advantage of the offer and deposited hundreds of metres of textual records. Accession files document that this arrangement created a mutually beneficial situation for both the PAA and the county: many counties happily deposited records to clear storage space in their offices. Deposits from counties include a variety of records such as assessment and tax rolls, grain registers, correspondence, cemetery lists, and health records, as well as the records of predecessor local government bodies such as improvement districts, municipal districts, school districts, and school divisions. Local government bodies such as towns and villages have also deposited records at the PAA.

Most acquisitions from local government bodies arrived at the PAA under “permanent loan” status. This type of agreement, now discontinued, stated that the PAA would assume responsibility for the physical custody and preservation of the records if the local government body would allow public access to the records. This agreement essentially allowed depositors to retrieve their records from the PAA should they later request them. In the 1990s and 2000s, the PAA resolved many of these permanent loans, asking depositors to sign certificates of gift transferring rights and ownership of

26 *School Amendment Act*, SA 1993, c. 24, s. 2.1.

27 Prairie Land Regional Division, [http://www.plrd.ab.ca/about\\_us.php](http://www.plrd.ab.ca/about_us.php) (accessed on 3 October 2008).

28 Palliser Regional Division, [http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&gid=37&Itemid=27](http://www.pallisersd.ab.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=37&Itemid=27) (accessed on 16 July 2008).

their deposits to the PAA.

The County of Athabasca No. 12 Fonds constitutes an example of the early solicitation efforts of the PAA. In 1968, the PAA received its first deposit from the County of Athabasca, and received several more accruals until 1976. The fonds consists of twenty-three metres of textual records including minutes, debentures, assessment and tax rolls, cash book disbursements, balance sheets, ledger accounts, labour pay sheets, seed grain accounts, cemetery registers, and correspondence of former local authorities of the County of Athabasca No. 12. The fonds also includes school district records from Athabasca School Division No. 42, formed in 1938.

The tax history between school districts and local government bodies has greatly influenced the kinds of records included in acquisitions from local government bodies at the PAA. If a school district collected taxes independently from a local government body, its tax and assessment rolls are unlikely to appear in an acquisition from a local government body. Conversely, if the local government body collected taxes on behalf of a school district, an acquisition from a local government body will more than likely contain tax and assessment rolls. However, the majority of donations from local government bodies contains assessment and tax rolls for school districts for the years following the passing of *The County Act* in 1950, when boundaries of municipal areas and school districts became coterminous and the county assumed administration over the school districts.

Legislation has also contributed to the prevalence of daily attendance registers in donations from local government bodies. For example the *School Ordinance* ordered teachers to create certain types of records, such as daily registers, to document the operation of the school.<sup>29</sup> In addition, legislation charged school board secretaries with responsibility for maintaining all types of records related to the operation of the school board such as receipts, invoices for materials and supplies, as well as correspondence with teachers, local government bodies, and the Government of Alberta.<sup>30</sup> However, if the school closed for a period of time or if a natural disaster such as a fire or flood befell the school, these administrative records (such as receipts and invoices) might not survive while school registers regularly ended up in the custody of the succeeding secretary.

That daily registers routinely form part of donations from local government bodies also relates to the perceived authority that the form of the school registers transmits. Registers, unlike receipts and correspondence, carry a recognizable and durable physical form: they are sturdy and bound. The physical characteristics and the form of the daily register ensured that

29 *School Ordinance*, 1884, No. 5, s. 80(7).

30 *School Ordinance*, 1884, No. 5 s. 69(5), s. 71.

employees of school districts viewed the daily register as not only a reflection of the day-to-day activities of the school, but also as a record worth preserving.

The PAA has also accepted large donations of school district records from educational bodies such as regional school divisions.<sup>31</sup> Since 1995, many regional divisions such as Pembina Hills Regional Division No. 7, Northern Lights School Division No. 69, and Prairie Land Regional Division No. 25 have donated records to the PAA. These acquisitions include records originating from the first sixty-two school divisions created in Alberta after the 1936 amendments to the *School Act* allowed for the establishment of school divisions, as well as records from regional divisions created after the 1993 amendments to the *School Act*.

To date, Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 has provided the PAA with one of the largest donations of school district records. In 2005, the Division donated over ten metres of textual records, including daily registers, budgets, surveys, evaluations, and correspondence dating from the 1920s to the 1990s. Black Gold, like most regional divisions, has a storied past. Its organization stems from the dissolution and formation of hundreds of school districts from the 1880s to the present and their amalgamation into various administrative bodies such as consolidated school districts, school divisions, counties, and finally a regional division. The administrative body known as the Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 was formed in 1995 when Leduc School District No. 297, the County of Leduc No. 25, and Devon School District No. 4972 dissolved, and Black Gold Regional Division assumed all assets and liabilities of the former school districts and county.<sup>32</sup>

The contents of the 2005 acquisition from the Black Gold Regional Division indicate that here too conditions related to taxation and the form of the records influenced the type of records found in the donation. Not surprisingly, school registers comprise the majority of the donation, with each year dutifully kept from nearly the beginning to the close of the twentieth century for many of the school districts of the region. The donation does not, however, include any records related to tax assessments. Tax assessment rolls remain in the custody of the municipality charged with paying taxes to support the schools of the division.<sup>33</sup>

31 According to section 1(d) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, an educational body refers to a university, technical institute, public college, the Banff Centre, a board, a charter school, and a regional authority as established under the *Post-secondary Learning Act*. See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, Revised Statutes of Alberta [hereafter RSA] 2000, c. f-25, s. 1(d).

32 Black Gold Regional Division, <http://www.blackgold.ab.ca/AboutUs/> (accessed on 26 February 2008).

33 After 1995, school divisions could no longer impose taxes on municipalities. Amendments to the *School Act* dissolved the School Foundation Program Fund and established the

Individuals have also donated school district records to the PAA. While these donations rarely match the volume acquired from local government bodies or educational bodies, they often contain older records of school districts that dissolved before the school district became part of a school division or a county. Most of these donations also include school registers. It would seem that many individuals considered that the early records of school districts, before the district joined a larger administrative body such as a school division, belonged to the community, and as such, members of the community retained the records.<sup>34</sup>

Not unlike both local government and educational bodies, a school district's tax history influences the kinds of records contained in an acquisition from private donors. If a municipality collected taxes on behalf of a school district, the assessment and tax roll will almost always arrive in a donation from a municipality. If a school district collected its own taxes, tax and assessment rolls will often appear in a donation from a private individual.

Private donors come into the custody of school district records in a variety of ways. In some cases, a local historical association might retain school district records after a school district has closed.<sup>35</sup> While in the custody of the historical association, the association might use the registers to prepare a local history book or to contact individuals for a school reunion. The local history section of the PAA reference library suggests that many local historical associations have taken advantage of school district records in their custody or in the custody of members of the community to produce publications. These local histories provide an account of pioneers and economic developments, and they almost always include a section devoted to school districts.

In other cases, a lifelong interest and employment as a teacher might prompt a donor to collect school district records. Over the years, the donor might have used this material to inform their private studies or publications. At the PAA, the John C. Charyk Fonds represents an excellent illustration of this type of donation. John C. Charyk, a Canadian educator and author of numerous histories of rural education in Alberta, had donated the daily attendance registers to the University of Alberta Archives. In 1990, the

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Alberta School Fund. Under the amendment, the Government of Alberta sets the rate of taxation that municipalities must contribute to the Alberta School Fund levied from property taxes. The municipality collects the money and transfers the money to the Government of Alberta. The government then distributes the money to school divisions. See the *School Amendment Act*, SA 1994, c. 29, s. 157.

34 One example of this kind of donation includes the Kulawy School District No. 1526 Fonds, PR2986.

35 In 2004, the New Sarepta Historical Association donated school registers to the PAA. See Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA], Black Gold Regional Division Fonds, PR2529, PR2004.0430.

Archives passed them on to the PAA.<sup>36</sup>

Private donors might also obtain school district records through their relationship with the school district. In many cases this relationship might result from service to the school district in some capacity, or association with an individual that served the school district. School board trustees, for example, maintained the closest relationship with a school district; they were members of the community, they knew the children, they managed the finances, and they maintained the records of the school district. Donations from school board trustees serving as secretary treasurers regularly include minute books from the meetings of the school board.<sup>37</sup>

Donations originating from school trustees often contain rare types of school district records. One particularly rich donation from a private donor came from Barbara Johnson (née Meyers) in 2008. Barbara Johnson's grandfather, J.V. Meyers served as Secretary Treasurer for Kerndale (formerly Reyda) School District No. 3402 from 1917 to 1934. The donation consists of several boxes of daily attendance registers from Kerndale District as well as Secretary Treasurer Meyers's financial records of the school district (including several hundred receipts). However, the donation also includes material not normally contained in acquisitions from private donors, educational bodies, or local government bodies. This unique material documents the school district's relationship with its teaching staff and includes teacher advertisements, correspondence related to salary negotiations and qualifications, teacher applications, and bulletins from the Alberta Teachers' Association.<sup>38</sup>

The condition of Barbara Johnson's donation also indicates that the form of the records assured that their custodians preserved some types of records with more care than other records. Of all the records contained in the acquisition, the school registers arrived in the best physical condition; clearly an individual took the time to store the records in an environment free of dust and moisture. Unfortunately the other half of the donation suffered the consequences of neglect. The remaining material had been stored in a large metal chest. The mould and high oxidation of the metal paper clips and staples on the records suggest that the chest had been at least partially submerged in water, possibly in a basement flood.

Occasionally individuals with no discernable relationship to a school district donate records to the PAA. For example, in 1990, Johanne Hotte found a tax assessment roll from Raymond School District No. 700 in the

36 The University of Alberta archives in Edmonton, Alberta holds records pertaining to John Charyk's authorial career in the John Constantine Charyk Fonds.

37 PAA, Clodford School District 2678 Fonds, PR2435.

38 PAA, J.V. Meyers Fonds, PR2534.

back alley behind his house in Saskatoon.<sup>39</sup> He contacted the PAA and donated the material in the same year.

PAA accession files are rife with other examples of donors' personal connections with school districts. In one instance, the PAA received a minute book from Beaver Creek School District No. 371 from Violet Hackett in 1984. Violet's father- and mother-in-law owned the land that housed the school district. When Violet's in-laws passed away, Violet and her husband Maxwell, a former student of the District, inherited the land as well as the minute book.<sup>40</sup> In another example, Shirley Porter donated the records of Lac Canard School District No. 4080 to the PAA in 1998. She received the material from her uncle, Walter Kitiuk, who had served as Secretary Treasurer of the school. Shirley's family had further connections with the school district: Shirley's great-uncle, William Halina, served as a school trustee, and Shirley's mother, Anne Poloway, taught at the school.<sup>41</sup>

### Access Conditions and Examples

Most users visiting the PAA to research school districts generally possess some knowledge of the educational history of Alberta, but few may be aware that the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* affects access to school district records. In 1998, FOIP legislation expanded to include all records created by educational bodies and in 1999, all records created by local government bodies.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, records donated to the PAA by counties and regional divisions fall under the authority of FOIP.

As a public body recognized under FOIP, the PAA must impose access restrictions to comply with the legislation.<sup>43</sup> The PAA is legislated to control how it collects and discloses personal information in order to protect the rights and privacy of the individuals represented in the records it acquires. As defined in the Act, "personal information" includes information collected during the creation of daily school registers.<sup>44</sup> School registers provide the

39 PAA, Town of Raymond Fonds, PR2197.

40 PAA, Beaver Creek School District No. 371 Fonds, PR2244.

41 PAA, Lac Canard School District No. 4080 Fonds, PR0037.

42 The FOIP act was amended to include school divisions in 1998 and local government in 1999. See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act*, SA 1999, c. 23, s. 4(iv), (v). The 1998 amendments were not published until 1999.

43 According to section 4(1) FOIP applies to all public bodies. See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, RSA 2000, c. f-25, s. 4(1). According to Section 1(i), a local public body refers to any municipality, improvement district, special area, board, management body, and Metis settlement, all established under legislation such as the *Municipal Government Act*, *Special Areas Act*, *Drainage Districts Act*, *Alberta Housing Act*, *Irrigation Districts Act*, *Metis Settlements Act*, and the *Library Act*. See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, RSA 2000, c. f-25, s. 1(i).

44 According to section 1(n) of FOIP, "personal information" refers to information regard-

name, date of a child's birth, home address, attendance, and occasionally include remarks on the child's educational performance; sometimes a school register may also contain the results of an examination tucked into the fold of the register.

Access to school district records at the PAA depends upon who donated the records and the date that the PAA acquired the records. Pursuant to section 4(1)(j), the Act does not apply to records donated to the PAA by individuals even if a local public body (county or regional division) created the records and if the records contain personal information. Furthermore, pursuant to section 3, the Act does not apply to records from educational bodies donated to the PAA prior to 1998 and local government bodies prior to 1999 before amendments to the FOIP Act brought educational bodies and local public bodies under the authority of FOIP.

The exceptions and limitations presented in sections 3 and 4 of the Act produce surprising consequences for users of school district records at the PAA. For example, a user seeking information about a family member will find that the same kind of information (birth date, address) may be restricted in an accession donated by a regional division in 1998, and fully available in an accession donated in 1997, even though a regional division, a body now subject to FOIP, created both accessions. Similarly, if a private individual donates school district records, a user can access this accession regardless of the date that the PAA acquired the accession and in spite of the personal information contained in the record.

Researchers might find exceptions such as these illogical, but the reasoning is fairly simple: if the records were open and available while in the custody of the PAA prior to 1998, the information has already been made public and could have been used and disclosed in a variety of ways. Likewise, the PAA cannot control how the information contained in school district records has been used and disclosed by private donors before the records came under the custody of the PAA. The PAA can only control future use of the records it receives from public bodies as mandated by the Act.

One example taken from the PAA's holdings, the Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 Fonds, helps to illustrate access conditions to school district records at the PAA. This fonds consists of fifteen metres of textual records acquired from both private donors and an educational body. Over the course

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ing (i) the individual's name, home or business address, or home or business telephone number, race, nationality, ethnic origin, political beliefs or associations, age, sex, marital status, fingerprints, biometric information blood type, genetic information or inheritable characteristics, educational, financial, employment or criminal history, health and health care history including information pertaining to a physical or mental disability, and an individual's personal views or opinions. See *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, RSA 2000, c. f-25, s. 1(n).

of six years the PAA received accessions from the following private and public donors: Allan Wronko (2000), New Sarepta Historical Society (2004), Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 (2004-2005), and Orville Boryss (2006). Combined these records form the Black Gold Regional Division No. 18 Fonds, yet researchers may only view accessions donated by private individuals.

FOIP provides users with two methods for obtaining access to school district records in accessions of the Black Gold Fonds that are subject to FOIP. First, according to section 43, users can wait until the records are seventy-five years old and no longer subject to FOIP. Second, section 6(1) allows users the right to make a request for any information under the custody and control of a public body, including information pertaining to them.<sup>45</sup> However, making a request does not automatically guarantee that the user will gain access to the material. FOIP serves a dual purpose: to provide access to the records of public bodies, and to protect the privacy of individuals represented in records of public bodies. Therefore, once the PAA receives a request for information, it must determine if the Act prohibits releasing the information, and ascertain if releasing the information will cause harm for reasons of personal privacy, third-party information, law enforcement, or public safety.

FOIP legislation also includes special provisions by which users can view school district records covered by the Act. According to section 43, if a user can demonstrate that his or her research work cannot be completed without viewing personally identifiable records, the PAA may release information for research purposes, provided that the information does not invade third-person privacy according to section 17 and that the record has been in existence for twenty-five years. Section 17(2)(j)(i) also allows the PAA to release the names of children who attended a school to facilitate school activities such as reunions, programs, field trips, awards, and graduations as long as the individual has not requested that the information not be disclosed.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Various administrative bodies have managed school districts in the Territories, and after 1905, Alberta. Initially, community members serving as school board trustees managed the day-to-day operation of the schools until

45 To make a formal request at the PAA, researchers must submit a written application to the FOIP Officer. Researchers can use a request form available in hard copy at the PAA or online via the PAA's website.

46 All FOIP requests are unique and treated on a case-by-case basis. Therefore this paper will not provide an exhaustive list of circumstances that the PAA could release school district records subject to FOIP.

1913, when legislation allowed school districts to merge under the administration of a single board and share a wider tax base. As various pieces of legislation passed, larger administrative bodies, such as school divisions, assumed responsibility for greater numbers of school districts.

These changes to the administration of school districts have not only influenced the types of donors that have provided school district records to the Provincial Archives of Alberta, but have also affected the types of records included in these donations. While acquisitions from all three types of donors include daily school registers, acquisitions from private donors generally include earlier and rarer types of records such as correspondence; acquisitions from local government bodies contain more financial types of records such as tax and assessment rolls; and donations from educational bodies include records relevant to the operation of a large administrative body such as surveys, evaluations, and budgets.

As an often consulted and cited body of records, school district records form a key collection of archival records at the PAA. Archivists must educate themselves on the conditions of providing access under FOIP and provide this information to users on web pages, in collection guides and handouts, and in person.<sup>47</sup> Well-educated archivists and informed patrons will ensure that researchers leave the PAA feeling that their research has been a success, not simply because they located the material that they desire, but because they have understood how and/or why the PAA must restrict access to these valuable records.

47 The Government of Alberta also provides reference materials regarding FOIP through its FOIP website: <http://foip.alberta.ca/index.cfm> (accessed on 23 October 2008). Two helpful references regarding the school districts include *Frequently Asked Questions for School Jurisdictions*, and *Frequently Asked Questions for Post-Secondary Institutions*. The PAA also provides an information handout on FOIP in its reference area as well as an overview of FOIP on its website.