

The Elsie Miles School grounds, with its longstanding tradition of serving as the Village playing fields, have been an integral, public use area for the community of Shawnigan Lake for well over seventy years.

Rumours that the owners of the property (heirs to the Finlay Estate) were going to subdivide the four acre site prompted swift action. Concerned, the Shawnigan Lake School Board bought the property, in 1938, as a potential school site and to ensure that the playing fields were preserved for the community.

For more than a decade after the purchase the fields remained undeveloped. Community events and large picnic excursions by Island companies, including David Spencer Stores and BC Electric, continued on the site.

In 1946, all of the small school boards, including Shawnigan Lake, were amalgamated into the Cowichan School District and, in 1951, Shawnigan Lake Elementary School was built on the village site. This school replaced the original Shawnigan Lake Elementary which, in turn, became *Mary Queen of the World Catholic Church*.

In 1950, The Shawnigan Improvement District was formed to provide a taxation process for firefighting costs. Shortly thereafter, a new firehall was built on part of the school grounds. The original two bay firehall was eventually expanded to include three bays with an office and a social area for the volunteer firemen. When a new firehall was constructed in the 80s, the Shawnigan Lake Historical Society transformed the old firehall into a museum which opened in 1983.

In 1958, BC celebrated its centennial as a British Colony. The event was marked by a large celebration in the community of Shawnigan Lake. A cement slab, again on the school property, was built to commemorate the event and aptly named *Centennial Park*. The slab was lined for tennis. Curbed edges allowed for flooding of the park for ice skating. *Centennial Park* is still in use and will feature various entertainment groups for the upcoming Canada Day Celebrations.



In 1974, Shawnigan Lake Elementary School was renamed to honour Elsie Miles. Miss Miles taught in the area for more than forty years and had been the principal at Shawnigan for thirty-two. The village school was recently retired by the school district.

Coming full circle, the school grounds are currently part of a purchase negotiation between the CVRD and the Cowichan Valley School District. This important acquisition follows with tradition and, finally and legally, will preserve the Village playing fields for the community of Shawnigan Lake for the future.