

## High School Memories



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Photos of us in Grade 12  
from our high school year book.

*December, 2008*

This article contains some of our fond memories of going to school in the Gordon Head area of Victoria during the years 1968 to 1973. It's mostly about our high school, Mt. Douglas, but it also has memories from the two junior high schools we attended, Gordon Head and Cedar Hill, and the change over that affected these schools in 1970. This article originally appeared and is still viewable on Mitch's website, [www.humblewoodcutter.com](http://www.humblewoodcutter.com).

In those days, in British Columbia, schools were designated elementary, junior high and senior high. Senior high schools were also called senior secondary schools. There were no "middle schools". Elementary schools had Grades 1 to 7, junior high schools had Grades 8 to 10 and senior high schools had Grades 11 and 12.

### Gordon Head

When we attended Gordon Head Junior High in Victoria as Grade 8 students in 1968 -1969, the principal was Mr. Harry Downard (also known to the kids as "Monk"). He had been the principal ever since the school opened in 1960 and he was regarded as a competent administrator and educator by both his staff and his students. But he was an older fellow with lots of archaic ideas about how a school should be run. For instance, students were not allowed to use the front doors of the building. These were only for guests. We were not to touch the walls for fear of getting them dirty. If kids wanted to walk around the building, they had to do so only in a clockwise direction. Girls were not allowed to wear slacks, pants or jeans. Only dresses or skirts were allowed, and they couldn't be too short. And when we had assemblies in the gym, all the boys had to sit on one side of the floor and all the girls had to sit on the other side. A wide pathway between the two groups was maintained that ran along an imaginary line from the PA speaker above the center of the stage to the back of the gym.

For students who broke these rules or got into other kinds of trouble, there was a punishment known as a "school detention" or a "schoolie". This was supposed to be more serious than a regular "class detention" because it was noted in the student's record. If we got a schoolie, we had to sit in a designated classroom for 30 minutes after school. A big X was drawn on the blackboard and we had to just sit there quietly, bolt upright, with our hands on the desk and look at the X. Kids actually got schoolies for some pretty minor things like sitting on tables or leaving their lockers open.

Mr. Downard was also very fond of the school's front yard. The grass was always neatly trimmed and he started a tradition of planting trees there. Every year a new tree was added by the students. Only three of them are still there now.

Mr. Downard retired at the end of that school year. He was replaced in 1969 by Mr. David Voth and all of his stodgy rules went out the window. We could even use the front doors – we had to in order to get to the three portable classrooms that were unceremoniously plunked down on Mr. Downard's precious front lawn.

Gordon Head had a lot of school spirit. Athletic teams and clubs for special interests and services were a big part of that spirit. The school was organized into four "houses" for

intramural sports – Finnerty, Cormorant, Douglas and Arbutus. Each student was assigned to one of the houses and that's who they played for if they chose to be involved in sports. The house standings were prominently displayed on a large scoreboard at the top of the main stairway. Gordon Head was especially strong in track and field, both in intramural play and in competition with other schools. The remains of a couple of broad jumping pits that we used to use are still visible in the back field.

One of the main events of the school year was the annual Spring Concert. These were huge variety shows that took many weeks to produce. The students did most of the staging work and all the performing. Rehearsals were often held during the school day, which meant that the performers and all the guys involved with the lights and communications got to skip classes. The whole production culminated in an evening performance held in the gym. Students, their families and anyone else who was interested could attend.

Some of the clubs that students could join included ones for drama, dancing, guitar playing, folk-rock music, chess, bridge, badminton, cross-country running, photography, and our favorite, the light show group. We used slide projectors, spot lights, film projectors, a home-made mirror ball, overhead projectors with transparent trays of food coloring and anything else we could get our hands on to put on light shows at the school dances. Students helped to keep the school running in the Service Club and the Library Club, and of course there was a cheerleader squad.

Gordon Head also had first-rate band. The band leader and music teacher was an ex-Canadian Armed Forces band leader named Mr. Emile Michaux. He was strict, but we always had the best bands.

Speaking of Gordon Head's teachers, we're sure anyone who was at the school in the late 60's fondly remembers (or at least can't forget) Mr. Ridley, Mr. Richards, Miss Boyd, Mr. Knight, Mrs. Quiney, Mr. Shires, Mrs. Mitchell, Mr. Kolodinski, Miss Corbishley, Mr. Dutton, Mr. Greenwood, Miss Mellor, Mr. Disbrow, Mr. Hoyt and Mr. Reay to name but a few. The title "Ms." wasn't used back then.

## Expansion

Mt. Douglas Senior Secondary, usually known simply as Mt. Doug, was originally located in a pink building on Cedar Hill Road near McKenzie Avenue. It officially opened on November 18, 1931. By the late 1960's, the building had become too small to be a high school. The Victoria School Board decided to close Gordon Head Junior High and move Mt. Doug to that location for the start of the 1970 school year. The other part of the plan saw two new junior high schools created for the area to replace Gordon Head. A brand new one called Arbutus was built and the old Mt. Doug building became Cedar Hill.

The students who used to go to Gordon Head were split between these schools. The cooler kids went to Cedar Hill and the nerds went to Arbutus. Actually, the school they went to depended on where they lived, but it did seem to work out the other way in a lot of cases! We went to Cedar Hill.

Even though Mt. Doug's new building was much bigger and more modern than its old location, there still had to be some additions and renovations done. Some of the work was completed in 1969 while it was still Gordon Head. A beautiful new library was added, as was a new band room, a new art room and some new science labs. All of these were added to the south wing. We were there as Grade 9 students and got to benefit from the improvements.

As Grade 10 students in 1970, it would have been better for us if the changeover happened a year later. That way, we could have gone to school in the same building for all of Grades 8 to 12. The building was closer to our homes than either Cedar Hill or Arbutus. We lived about half way between the two schools so we had the option to go to either one. We picked Cedar Hill because most of our friends were going there and it was slightly closer to where we lived. There are probably Grade 12 students who lived close to the old Mt. Doug building in 1970 who wished the change took place a year later, too.

Mt. Doug did have a small Grade 10 class, but it was mainly for enterprising kids who didn't mind being younger than the rest of the students, or high school students that didn't have all of their Grade 10 credits.

## Cedar Hill

We were sorry to see Gordon Head closed down, especially since it meant going to Cedar Hill for Grade 10. Cedar Hill's building was too old and dumpy to be a high school and it wasn't much better as a junior high. Even its vice principal at the time, Mr. Robert Jones, described it as "in many ways old and inadequate" in an article he wrote for its 1971 annual.

To make up for Cedar Hill's small size, lots of portable classrooms had to be installed behind the building. These were such an important part of the school that its 1971 annual was called *Selbatrop*, which is "portables" spelled backwards. These days, the portables have been replaced by a new addition, renovations have taken place and the building's color is now the old Gordon Head colors, green and gold! Well, it's green and yellow, anyway. (Green and gold were Gordon Head's "athletic" colors, the building itself was actually mainly gray.)

Probably the biggest event to take place at Cedar Hill while we were there was a bit of student unrest. There was an attempt to organize a "grease day" at the school. This is where students come to class dressed in fashions from the 1950's. For example, the guys wear torn jeans and leather biker jackets and plaster their hair down with excessive amounts of Brylcreem. The Students' Council tried to set it up but the principal, Mr. Claude Campbell, didn't approve it.

About forty kids decided to come to school greased up anyway on April Fool's day. They were sent home, but some of them came back with placards and held a protest in front of the school. The protesters thought getting greased up was just a harmless joke and the principal had blown the whole thing out of proportion. Most of the other students agreed that the greasers were treated unfairly and we walked out of our classes to join the demonstration.

The incident made the local newspaper a couple of times. One report quotes a student named Peter Taggart as saying he and three other boys were suspended for the rest of the school year for organizing the protest. They would only be allowed back to school if they apologized to Campbell. Taggart was a well-known class clown but he was serious about the protest. Another report quotes Campbell as saying no one was suspended and he only wanted the boys' promise that this sort of action wouldn't be repeated. He also said the boys eventually gave him the promise. Either way, the four boys returned to school. Cedar Hill had a new principal the following year.

Like the students, Gordon Head's teachers were also split between Arbutus and Cedar Hill. We thought Arbutus got the better end of the deal, but Cedar Hill had some excellent ones too. Mr. Peter Richards, Mr. Harry Disbrow and Mr. Charles Hoyt come to mind. There were lots of others, though. There were also some who hadn't been at Gordon Head. Who could forget the old PE teacher, Mr. J. Morrison, who was also known as "Mohawk" to the kids. And there was a first-rate woodworking teacher named Mr. John Frey. Things he taught us about craftsmanship and attention to detail remain with us to this day.

Cedar Hill has now had 38 years to develop its own traditions and school spirit. Hopefully it has. Those things were not very abundant when we were there in its first year.

## Mt. Douglas

By the fall of 1971 our year of hell at Cedar Hill was behind us. Now we were big high school kids at Mt. Doug for Grade 11. It was good to be back in the building once again. We were also reunited with classmates that we hadn't seen since Grade 9 because they went to Arbutus for their Grade 10. Some of them hadn't changed much but others looked and acted quite differently. A year makes quite a difference for people that age. If they're lucky, girls get sexier and guys get less geeky.

Mt. Doug's principal at the time was Mr. John J. Lowther, also known as "J.J." or "Jack". He was well liked and respected by his staff and most of the students. The school ran very well under his leadership.

As mentioned earlier, the building had been expanded to get it ready to be a high school. The new library was probably the biggest change. It had carpeting, private study cubicles and even a TV. The new band room behind the gym was also pretty posh. It had carpeting, acoustical treatment on the walls and tiered risers for the musicians. There was a large lunch room, but no cafeteria. Sometimes a group of students ran a "soup kitchen", though. They made soup and sold it at lunchtime to raise money for charities.

The gym hadn't been expanded yet. It was still the same size as it was in the Gordon Head days. There was a system of bleachers on the north wall. They were folded up most of the time to give more room for gym classes. They could be quickly deployed for assemblies or basketball games or other spectator events. There were windows on the second floor that looked into the gym and the boy's locker room had its own entrance directly into the gym.

The building was pretty much gray in color. A lot of it was unpainted cinderblocks. The main entrance didn't have the curved walls and the large sign it has now. Classrooms that faced south had awnings on their windows which have since been removed. Many students had cars and a parking lot for them was built at the south-east end of the front yard. The north end of the property just had the staff parking lot and one "cage" for large shop class projects. There were only three portable classrooms and they were on the front lawn at the north-east end. Mt. Doug's main neighbor was a private club for racquet and ice sports called The Racquet Club. It was on the south boundary and it's now part of the University of Victoria. Across the street on Gordon Head Road were some old houses and a Navy radio station. To the north and the west were large undeveloped fields.

We didn't have anywhere near the amount of specialized classes that are available now. Kids who planned to go on to university had to take the Grade 11 and 12 courses in math, English, at least one science (physics, chemistry or biology) and French 11. Everything else was up to them. Most took two science classes along with other courses that they thought would help prepare them for their chosen careers, or that they thought would be interesting or just slack. It was much the same for those who didn't want to prepare for university, except the math and science requirements were lighter.

Other classes that were available included history, social studies, commerce, economics, physical education, metalwork, auto mechanics, music, art, childcare, foods and creative writing. Classes that figure more prominently in our minds, either because of their uniqueness, their usefulness or their teachers deserve special mention.

Mt. Doug was the first high school in Victoria to have a computer programming class. It was a Grade 11 course called Computer Math, although there wasn't much math involved. The teacher was a very popular one with her students, Mrs. Margaret Parker.

Personal computers wouldn't arrive until 1975 and it would be another four or five years before they became powerful enough to do anything useful. That meant we didn't have computers in the classroom. The University of Victoria was nearby, however, and they had a good computer science department along with a big IBM computer system. The main reason Mt. Doug had that class was its proximity to UVIC. Arrangements were made so that Mt. Doug Computer Math students could use UVIC's computer facilities to run their programs.

The Mt. Doug class was pretty much the same as a first year introductory computer course at UVIC, Math 170. The language we learned was a version of FORTRAN called WATFIV. It's very similar to BASIC, the language that everybody used if they programmed their early personal computers, and both languages use plain English words for a lot of their commands. Even though the language was easy to learn, writing and running our programs was quite a complex job.

First we had to write a flow chart. Then we had to write a series of WATFIV statements to implement the flow chart. All of this was done without even getting close to a computer. Then

we had to go to UVIC, sit down at a key punch machine and type out the program. Then we went to another room with a stack of punch cards and gave them to a person who ran them through a card reader. Then we went over to a printer the size of two refrigerators and watched for it to print the program. After a few minutes if all went well, a listing of the program and whatever it was supposed to do would come out. More often than not the program wouldn't run because of programming or typing errors. That meant we had to take the cards back to the key punch room and try to fix whatever went wrong. By today's standards, that sounds like a lot of nonsense, but we had fun doing it.

Some classes were lectures and others were free periods for us to write our programs or go to UVIC to run them. The class was one hour long which was just enough time for us to go to UVIC, run a program and get back to school. If we had cars, that meant we had a bit more time at UVIC to debug the program. Most of our work at UVIC was done in the evenings or on weekends, though, when we had a lot more time.

Mt. Doug students were quite fortunate to have had that class and a fine teacher like Mrs. Parker to teach it. We got to run our little programs on a computer system that filled several rooms. We got to hang out at the university with some real computer geeks. And when we finally got our own personal computers, what we learned came in very handy.

Another useful course was Law 11. It wasn't meant to turn kids into Perry Masons, or even prepare them for law school, it just taught some basic things about law that everybody should know. We learned a bit about traffic law, criminal law, contracts, income tax, the court system and family law. Our teacher was Mr. Wilf Trappier. He was also known to the students (and some of the staff) as Wolf Trappier.

A class that wasn't as useful but still fun was Stagecraft 11. The teacher was a young Englishman named Mr. Michael Stephen. He looked more like a hippie than a teacher, though, with his long hair and beard. His classes were very informal. He preferred to be called "Mike" by students who got to know him better by participating in his after school drama workshops.

Our main Stagecraft project was actually producing a play. It was the stage version of Shirley Jackson's famous short story, *The Lottery*. We're sure most people know the story since it's such a favorite with English teachers. We built the scenery ourselves and worked out all the backstage business such as music, lighting and sound effects. The actors were all Mt. Doug students who volunteered to be in the show. We worked on the scenery and staging during class and rehearsed after school. The play was performed one evening on the Mt. Doug stage and again at a drama festival for Victoria's high schools.

Mike also taught English. His classroom was one of the portables so we could be noisier than if we were in the main building. It wasn't uncommon to hear the Rolling Stones or John Lennon blasting from a record player. Sometimes we read books and wrote essays. Usually, though, we had lively discussions or worked on creative projects such as splicing together old TV commercial films to make some kind of humorous or anti-commercial statement.

On the serious side, there was Math and Physics. Our teacher in Grade 12 was Mr. Norman Eyres. These subjects can be challenging for many students, but Mr. Eyres was good at explaining the concepts.

Our Physics 11 teacher was a young, good-natured Australian named Mr. Tom Baldwin. We managed to actually learn some science despite his frequent funny stories about the land Down Under. We hear that he retired around 2001 after a long and illustrious teaching career, and that he also taught Math and Computer Science and he was responsible for creating an earlier version of the Mt. Doug website.

We were one of the last groups of students to use slide rules for our science and math classes. Scientific calculators were just becoming available at the time but they cost hundreds of dollars, putting them out of range for high school kids. They were portable, although not small enough to fit in a pocket. Sometimes you could see a nerd at university with one hanging from his belt, though. Basic four-function calculators were also just becoming available, but even they cost \$100 or more. A couple of years later, the size and price dropped and just

about everybody had some kind of calculator.

Woodworking 11 was an interesting class that has proved to be very useful. Mt. Doug had a couple of excellent craftsmen, Mr. William Miles and Mr. Colin Quail, as its woodshop teachers. Those who were lucky enough to be in Mr. Miles' class benefited from the long lifetime of experience that he shared with his students.

Students got to design and build whatever project they wanted as long as it used furniture building techniques. Some of the projects were pretty elaborate, such as water skis, speaker cabinets for rock band use and tables inspired by antique Oriental designs. Girls could take the class, too, and a few of them did.

The Grade 12 woodworking course dealt with larger construction projects. Students worked as a team building a couple of campers and projects for houses.

We knew Mr. Quail better as the teacher for Drafting 11. This was a course in basic mechanical drawing, and of course, there were no computers involved in those days. We used pencils, paper and drafting machines. We did learn about mechanical drafting pencils, though, which was a real breakthrough for us!

When this article was originally written in 2003, Mr. Quail was one of three teachers that were still at Mt. Doug after all those years, along with Mr. Bill Conconi and Mr. Monty Fulton.

There were numerous clubs, teams and organizations that students could join. One of them was the Audio-Visual Club. Mt. Doug was one of two schools in Victoria that had video recording equipment at the time, and this is before the days of camcorders or even Betamax and VHS videocassettes. We had a Sony system consisting of a video tape recorder that used ½" open reel tape, a portable camera and a small monitor. The equipment was very bulky by today's standards and it recorded only in black and white.

Students in the A-V Club used this equipment mainly to record TV shows for teachers to use in their classes and sporting events involving Mt. Doug's teams. Much of this was done in the evenings or after school, so club members gave up some of their free time to do it. If we were recording a TV show that was broadcast in the evening, that meant we had to either take the recorder and a monitor home or we had to come to the school to do it. Recording a sports event away from school meant we had to pack up all the equipment and transport it to the game's location. Only a few members had cars, so we were the ones that ended up recording anything outside of the school.

We were especially proud of our coverage of the 1973 inter-school track meet that was held at Centennial Stadium. We borrowed a camera from the other school that had video equipment and built our own little switcher so we could do a two-camera shoot. It wasn't exactly CBC Olympic quality, but it was still pretty good for what we had!

The A-V Club also supplied any film projectors, audio tape machines or record players that teachers needed for their classes. There was a little storeroom on the second floor where the equipment was kept. Club members hung out there during their free periods, so the room was usually manned all day by one or two students.

It was fun to work with the equipment, which was the main reason we joined. We weren't looking for any fame or special status at the school, but it would have been nice if the administration showed more appreciation for the effort some of us put into serving Mt. Doug's audio-visual needs.

A related club was CRUD, a fictitious radio station that broadcast music programs over the school's PA system at lunch time. We recorded the programs at home using our own record collections and audio tape machines borrowed from the school's A-V department. There were lots of casual members, but only three or four kids consistently produced shows. We got to play disc jockey and say cool things like, "Here's new music from Led Zeppelin." Nobody's been able to say that for a long time!

*Reach for the Top* was a popular national TV quiz show for high school students on the CBC in those days. It's still on the air now, but it's on the Knowledge Network. Mt. Doug always put a good team together, but they couldn't get past their arch rivals, Nanaimo High, who were the Vancouver Island champions in 1972 and 1973.

There were lots of other clubs and teams, too. Mr. Conconi ran the Girl's Automotive Club. They learned how cars work and how to do minor repairs. There was an improvisational performance group called "A" Troupe led by Mike Stephen. There were also clubs for camping and outdoor activities, chess, badminton and curling. The Activities' Club and the Student Council organized entertainment and fund raising events. The Library Club kept that part of the school running. The girls in the Broadcasting Club read each morning's announcements on the PA system. The Spades helped and entertained hospital patients, shut-ins, the elderly, the needy and people with physical and mental challenges.

Basketball was a popular sport. Lots of kids always came out to cheer on Mt. Doug's boys' team, the Rams and the girls' team, the Ramblers. The Ramblers won the BC championship title two years in a row in 1972 and 1973. The girls' field hockey team also were BC champions in 1973 and runners-up in 1972. There was a rugby team, a swimming team, a cross-country team and boys' and girls' teams for soccer and volleyball. And of course there were Mt. Doug's cheerleader squads that got the crowd going at basketball, rugby and soccer games. In the 1972 / 1973 basketball season, the cheerleaders tried being in the stands with the crowd instead of on the floor. They figured that would rally the fans more than simply performing on the sidelines.

Dances were probably the biggest social events at Mt. Doug. Several were held throughout the school year. Whether you came "stag" or "drag", it was fun to get dressed up and come to the school more as a guest than a student. There were some great bands that played at the dances. A popular local one was called Holy Smoke. Sometimes we got bands from Vancouver, too, like Applejack. They became more famous a couple of years later when they got a recording contract and changed their name to Trooper.

In addition to the dances organized by Mt. Doug's Student Council, there were also SPOT dances. SPOT stood for the Saanich Police Organization for Teens. Victoria had a similar outfit called COSY (City Organization Supporting Youth) and Esquimalt's was POET (Police Organization for Esquimalt Teens). Any junior high or high school student could join as long as they were at least 15 years old. Each organization tried to maintain good relations between the city's teens and the police by sponsoring fun events. The biggest ones were the dances and several were held at various schools throughout the year.

The last event of our high school career was of course graduation. The formal ceremony wasn't held at Mt. Doug, though. It seemed peculiar not to be at our school for such an important event, especially since it was held at a junior high school. But Mt. Doug's gym simply wasn't big enough to hold over 440 graduating students and their families. The closest school that had a gymnasium big enough was Lansdowne. Some Mt. Doug students went to Lansdowne, so it must have been a bit nostalgic for them to go back. For the rest of us, it was just strange.

We all dressed in our best clothes for the event, which was held on a Friday night in June. Some guys rented tuxedos, others wore suits. The girls all had fancy gowns or dresses. We sat on bleachers in the gym, facing the audience who sat in chairs. Mr. Lowther presided over the ceremony from a podium in front of the bleachers, also facing the audience.

We were called one at a time to shake Mr. Lowther's hand and receive a gold pin that said "MDSS 1973". No fancy diplomas were handed out. All we got was a computer generated transcript of our marks in the mail a few weeks later.

An awards ceremony followed the pin presentation. Like most of these events, most of the recipients deserved their awards, some only got them because they made themselves well-known to the administration and others who deserved some recognition were overlooked.

The guest speaker was Paul Horn, an internationally famous jazz musician who lived in the

Gordon Head area. He gave an inspirational speech and finished by playing a song on his flute.

After the ceremony, there was a dance, also at Lansdowne. This was supposed to be the "prom" we guess, but it was never called that and it seemed to be just another school dance except for the formal clothes everyone wore.

Several private parties were also held that night. We had a lot more fun at one of them than we did at the dance. It was hosted by a student named Peter Cummings. We partied well into the night fuelled by the exuberance of finishing high school, being with our friends, good music on the stereo and of course ample quantities of beer and wine.

The next evening, there was a dinner at a local restaurant for any grads that chose to attend. There were also several more private parties. Late that night (actually early Sunday morning) there was another official event at a local night club called the Purple Onion. After the club closed for regular business at 2 AM, we took it over for an all-night party. Most of us weren't 19 years old yet so they couldn't serve alcohol, but many kids snuck some in. The band was a local one called Teen Angel. They did a 1950's rock 'n roll revival show. The party finished around 6 AM. It was followed by a pancake breakfast at a nearby restaurant called Smitty's.

The grad events were organized by a committee of seven students and a teacher named Mr. Clazie. High school graduation is probably the most important event in an 18-year-old's life and it's something people remember for the rest of their lives. Organizing such a momentous event is a difficult job. Maybe some of our grad events could have been improved upon, but for the most part, we have to commend the people who organized them for a job well done.

That brings an end to this rather long-winded account of being students in the late 60's and early 70's. We remember those times fondly, even after 40 years. We hope you enjoyed reading it and it brought back at least a few good memories of your own.