

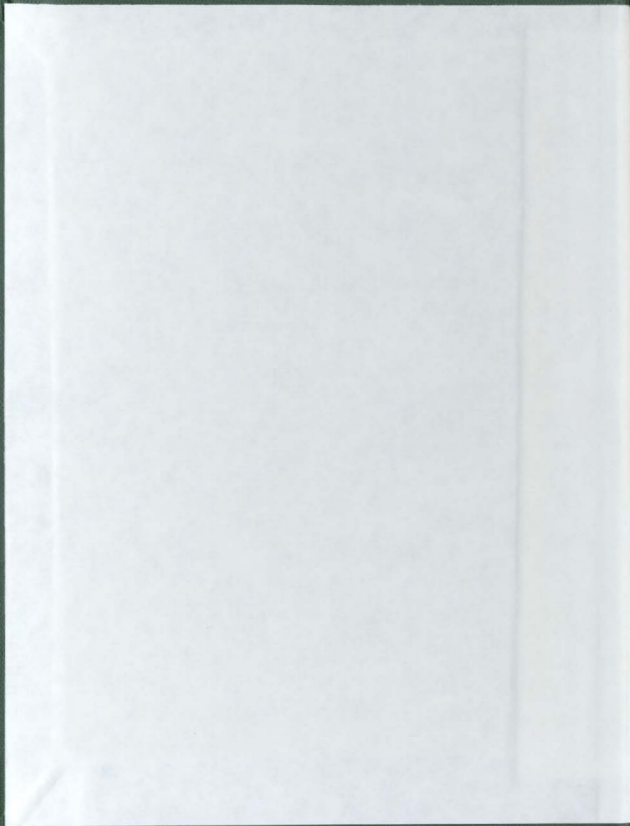
SCHOOL CLOSURE AND CONSOLIDATION IN TWO
SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NEWFOUNDLAND

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**School Closure and Consolidation in Two Small
Rural Communities in Newfoundland**

A thesis submitted to The Department of Education in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Education

by

Ward William Samson BA., B.ED.

Submitted to the Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the process and turmoil that accompanies the closure of small schools in rural communities. The specific context is rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose is to tell the stories of how the people of two communities attempted to fight and resist the efforts of the local school board to close and/or consolidate their schools. Using a case study methodology, the thesis traces the sequence of events starting with the initial rumours of an impending closure. For each of the communities in the study, the thesis describes the strategies the people used in their attempts to resist the school board's intentions. In the end both communities lost their battle and their small schools were closed.

Although both community and school board sources were consulted for this thesis, the primary intention has been to tell the story of this struggle from the communities' point of view. Seldom in the history of school closure and consolidation have the views, arguments and pain caused by a closure battle survived and been recorded. The reason for this as Tyack (1974) has pointed out is that history is always written by the victors. Those defeated, generally, do not get to tell their story. Although there have been hundreds of closure battles in Newfoundland and Labrador and thousands in North America, one would be hard pressed to find sympathetic accounts of the struggle from a community's point of view.

Given this set of circumstances, this thesis makes a significant contribution to not only our knowledge of an important rural education issue here in Newfoundland and Labrador, but in all contexts where there are or have been small community schools under siege.

To my wife Elaine and my two sons Ryan and James,
who sacrificed their summers, hockey schools and
swimming lessons for me and this work. Many appreciations
and thank you for your love and understanding.

Many thanks to Dennis M. Mulcahy, Alan Bock, Oliver Arthur
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Chapter One

Introduction

When I was a student, the small school was the centre of my community. I began Kindergarten in a one room school with ten other grades in the same room. How proud and important you felt when you got to be one of the big boys and was entrusted to light the fire in the morning. You remember your Dad going with you the first morning, to show you how to light the fire. You knew that he went only once, so you had better pay attention and get it right the first time, because tomorrow the responsibility was all yours. How good and important you felt when the fire began to crackle, and the old stove began to throw its warmth around the room.

The lessons were well-learned. By the time you had overheard the grade ahead of you recite their lessons, had gone through the lessons yourself, then heard the grade behind you go through theirs, you figured you had it made.

Recess time and lunch time were for games of tiddly, bandy-ball, scout and running. Running home to lunch, running back to school, and running to Uncle George Cunards' to listen to him read from Zane Grey and Luke Short Westerns. Running to the CO-OP store for a candy that Nellie always gave us, even if we didn't have that penny. It seems now, in looking back, that school was a full day's event of running.

Running to the future, but learning from the past.

I graduated from our small school, St. Matthew's, in 1966 and was bused to a new central high school for grades 7-12. St. Matthew's lasted for another five years and then it was closed. My younger brothers, who were attending that school were bused to a new centralized elementary school 8 km away.

Will small, rural schools like St. Matthew's soon become a memory, or do they have a viable future in this changing world? This question is of great concern, now, as rural schools and rural communities in Newfoundland, find themselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, there is a need to find means to retain local schools for community identity as well as local educational and social development of students. On the other hand declining enrollments, changing educational standards and out-migration create pressures on the government to examine measures to increase economic efficiency in their educational budgets. Closing small rural community schools is one such measure that has been resorted to many times in this province whenever the issue of educational reform has been raised.

Purpose of This Thesis

School closure and consolidation have been a consistent theme in educational debates in Newfoundland and Labrador since Confederation. There has always been a consistent belief on the part of educational leaders that the way forward for education in rural Newfoundland and Labrador was the closure of the many small community schools and the bussing of the children to larger centralized schools. Such a change it was claimed would be more efficient and better educationally for the children. (In 1962-1963, there were 1,249 schools in Newfoundland and Labrador (*The Northern Pen*, Oct. 6, 1995, p. 4A). Currently there are 462 schools (*Dept. Of Education, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador, 1996*).

The Resettlement Program of the 1960's, where rural Newfoundland witnessed a massive migration from small inlets and coves into government allocated growth centres can be seen in large part from this educational perspective. One of the main impetuses for people being willing to relocate was the "promise" of bigger and better educational opportunities for their children. The result was that not only did schools close and students move, but whole communities were floated across the bay. Since the 1960's Resettlement Program, whole communities may not have moved, but schools are still being closed and students are being bused to larger schools with the "promise" of bigger and better educational opportunities.

Currently the pros and cons of school consolidation are being discussed with renewed frequency, and each year school boards all across Newfoundland face one of their most divisive issues: the closure of a community school. However, school consolidation is becoming much more difficult to achieve than was the case 20 years ago. School closures and consolidations have become emotional affairs as parents and communities are less willing to accept that "bigger is better" or "reorganization is more efficient." Most communities, now, strongly resist any movements to close their schools. A more recent example is from a concerned community resident who presented his arguments to Education Minister, Roger Grimes in Sept., 1996 at the education reform public consultation meetings:

Bigger is not always better, Mr. Minister, sometimes it's just bigger... Taking a school out of a small community is like taking the heart right out of it.
(*The Pilot*, Sept. 25, 1996.)

Community residents often feel intensely threatened when their school is designated to be closed. Many residents feel that the closing of a school is a fatal assault on their community and a way of life and react quickly and angrily to the proposed closure. A community school is seen as a government facility and parents and other members of the community expect to have some say in any discussion about its future. Educational debate, especially when it leads to policy decisions, affecting

the lives of students and parents, is often parcelled in emotion and rhetoric instead of evidence in relevant research. Furthermore, this management of change in our educational system, is not simply a technical and an administrative problem but a political problem. The decision by a school board to close a community school is a traumatic event for most communities. Recent evidence of this occurred as residents of Cox's Cove defended their school at a public meeting early in 1997:

One by one they strode up to the podium and told the board in no uncertain terms, "Don't dare take our school away from us." (*The Western Star*, Apr. 5, 1997)

The purpose of this thesis was to describe in detail how a closure and consolidation attempt by a school board was carried out in two small rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. The story was told to a large extent from the point of view of the community. The researcher began each case history when the communities in question first heard rumours that their school was targeted for closure. The researcher then traced the sequence of events that lead up to the final decision by the school board as to the fate of the community school.

The very nature of Newfoundland's geography, with its rugged coastline has made isolation and out-migration a constant reality in our history. Despite the development of sophisticated networks of transportation and communication, it still

exists today.

Many of those basic education difficulties and disabilities remain constant for rural Newfoundland today as it was in the past. The result is an ongoing perception that small rural schools lag behind national and provincial urban standards in education. Furthermore, most small rural schools, today, are experiencing declining enrollments and are burdened with statistics purporting educational “backwardness” (for example, see rural/urban comparisons in *Testing Standards*, the CTBS results for grade 12, 1994). This, in conjunction with the current fiscal restraint policy of our government, have become factors that influence school board policy to close/consolidate schools.

Significance of the Study

Very little research has been conducted in this province focusing on rural education in general and school closure and consolidation in particular. Although valuable contributions have been made by Baksh and Singh (1978), Riggs (1987) and Mulcahy (1992), rural education studies remain a marginal enterprise in this province. By telling the story of the two school closure battles from the point of view of the communities, this thesis has taken a unique perspective. This made it significant not only in the Newfoundland context but also in the wider context of rural education studies. Sher (1977) has remarked that most of what we know about school closure

and consolidation has come to us from the views of those who generally win such battles, the school boards.

Limitations of the Study

This thesis tells the story of two communities and their struggle to keep their small schools. The story is told through the available documentation and the recollections of some of the people involved in what has been called the “consolidation wars” (Dunne, 1978). The thesis makes no claim that the two examples are necessarily representative of what occurs in this kind of situation. However, readers of the thesis who are familiar with similar situations will be able to recognise many common themes and actions on the part of the school and the communities involved. Nevertheless, it would be unwise to attempt any generalizations based on these two instances. The research also relies on the memories of the people involved. Although the cases being written about are fairly recent, it is also recognized that personal recollections has its limitations.

Chapter II - Literature Review

The “conventional wisdom” regarding small rural schools is that they are educationally inefficient and backward, and therefore, should be closed and consolidated at every opportunity (Sher, 1977). Yet, many people prize their education from those small schools and many leaders today are proud of the fact that their education began in small rural schools. However, times are changing and costs rather than values are more often used by policy makers and planners to determine the viability of schools. As a consequence, communities, whose schools are seen as not economically viable, are “asked” to agree to the closure of their schools. Closing those schools which house small student populations, is based, in part, on the general belief that school consolidation leads to better facilities, diversified programs for students and eventually to more equal educational opportunities. Those very arguments that still surface today, were initiated by James Bryant Conant in the 1950's (Conant, 1959).

Conant's contention was that larger schools were more efficient and offered more comprehensive programs (Conant, 1959). This perspective became a general policy used to close schools in the 1960's, and saw the general adoption of the basic premise that “bigger is better.” Many studies that followed Conant's initial work seem to support the view that larger schools are cheaper and more efficient to operate.

Yet, Bell and Sigsworth (1987) point out that the problems inherent with those

studies include wide variations in the minimum and maximum school sizes favoured by writers and researchers in comparing cost figures. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) point out that there is great disagreement in the research about whether larger schools offer a higher quality education and that school closures became both a political and an economic problem.

The criteria for consolidating schools that come from the literature are couched in terms such as economy of scale, declining enrollment, school size, better education, better facilities, together with more opportunity and more program choices. However, each of those concepts needs to be analysed and a thorough review of the literature will attempt to do so.

Economies of Scale

Economy of scale is an economist's term that describes reduction of unit costs as size increases (Lam, 1982). It is a concept which originated in the 1920's under the paradigm of the Scientific Management School. Galton and Patrick (1990) refute this idea because participants in the debate can't seem to agree on which factors should be included into the "economic equation" when drawing up a balance sheet for or against consolidation.

The basic criterion used in the economy of scale equation is the unit costs per

student in staffing and maintenance being offset against the costs of student transportation to alternative schools. Forsythe (1983), who investigated the financial savings estimated by local authorities in fifteen cases of closure, concluded that in four of those cases there appeared to be no net savings at all and in three others the results were inconclusive. Thurston and Clauss (1985), Bell and Sigsworth (1987), Galton and Patrick (1990) and Jones (1985) all establish that some cost reduction may be realized through certain economies of scale in some consolidations, but it is by no means automatic. Hind (1979), in his examination of the relationship between consolidation and capital costs services, concluded that there may be an economy of scale associated with size alone, and that elementary schools with less than 100 students may realize an economy of scale. On the other hand, schools with a population of more than 100 would begin to reduce any economy of scale. Hind (1979) also points out that the effects of transportation would affect any savings.

Marshall (1985) says that, in Manitoba, where there are more than 100 one and two teacher schools, closure and transportation would be physically difficult as well as costly. Dawson and Dancey (1974) explain that the variation of cost in primary schools in Ontario would be attributed to variation in the student-teacher ratio, and school-size was not found to be a significant variable. Marshall (1985), in Table I, further points out that the majority of savings (88%) or \$ 87,432 for his particular study, would be in

the reduction of two teaching units. In all other areas the closure results in minimum savings and, in fact, some increased costs.

Marshall (1985) also concludes that "where net reductions of teaching staff are not possible, economic reasons for closure become hard to find" (p.16). Bell and Sigsworth (1987) state that advocates of "bigger is better" and the evidence to support their ideas is "grounded in very little substantive evidence"(p.3). Jones (1985) agrees and points out that this is the case in Illinois where the state board's report "shows conclusively that large schools are educationally inferior"(p.2). Yet, there is no discussion of these deficiencies and that "evidently bigger is better regardless of the facts when political ends are served"(p.2). Jones (1985) further confirms that the state proposes to maintain inferior education for students in urban areas by destroying a highly successful educational instruction in rural areas.

Table I
Cost comparison of "X" school as Is and
with "X" closed and Students sent to 'Y' School.

Cost Item	'X' as Is	With 'X' Students at 'Y'	Cost Difference
(1) STAFFING			
Principal's allowance	\$ 2,839		\$ 2,839
2.9 teacher salaries	102,202	\$33,960	68,242
.5 para/l. clerk	5,540		5,540
.5 secretary	6,650		6,650
Substitutes	1,250		1,250
3% fringe benefits	3,554	1,019	2,535
	\$112,035	\$34,979	\$87,056
(2) Utilities/Services Telephone, Hydro, postage	\$6,559	\$22	\$6,537
(3) Instructional Supplies	\$4,381	\$4,381	(0)
(4) Repairs/Maintenance	\$9,839		\$9,839
(5) Transportation	\$14,630	\$16,130	(1,500)
(6) Small Schools Grant	(4,500)		(\$4,500)
Total of (1) To (5)	\$142,944	\$55,512	\$87,432

(Marshall, D. (1985). Closing small schools, or when is small too small? *Education Canada*, Fall, 1985, p. 15.)

The economy of scale literature suggests that while there has been substantial research done on urban schools in the postwar years, very little research has been forthcoming on schools in rural areas. Bell and Sigsworth (1987) also point out that

the research that does exist "consists of hot rhetoric rather than cool information" (p.3). DeYoung (1987) also finds much of the available research on rural education relatively unsophisticated compared with most research in mainstream educational journals. He states that the research that does exist:

... is founded in historical, comparative and political agendas, and not on strategies which capitalize on the strengths of small schools or seek to correct deficiencies (p.86).

Sher (1977) concludes that studies of consolidation in the '70's strongly suggest that consolidation did not result in the anticipated savings expected. Sher (1977) with a similar view suggests that consolidation is a political issue rather than an educative or economic one.

Walker (1977), in his case study of the closure of Pedlam Secondary School in Ontario, demonstrates this to be true. The Pedlam Secondary school was slated to be closed in 1970. The battle lasted for three years and three months until the board closed the school in 1973. The local people used every technique known in a democratic society to keep their school open. When their representative failed to protect them, they elected a new one. They formed an effective interest group with committed leadership and sufficient funds. They used both the local and the national media. They hired a lawyer who took their case through the Ontario courts. They held audiences with the premier and every opposition member, and the provincial teachers'

association presented a brief on their behalf, but all to no avail. Their school closed.

Walker (1977) then suggests that small schools are closed because educators think them to be no longer workable and his evidence suggests that savings from school closures are very difficult to prove. Jones (1985) contends "that the loser becomes the average student," and this is justified under the rubric of "economy of scale. (p.4).

Lam (1982) suggests that consolidation, because of additional capital expenses associated with consolidation - salaries, expansion of facilities and transportation, create diseconomies of scale. He points out that in addition to administrative costs, the transportation costs, especially in rural districts, far often outweigh the proposed savings of consolidation.

Holland, Baritelle, and White (1976) investigated the relationship between financial savings from consolidation and the expenses involved in transportation. They concluded that consolidation could not be assumed to provide any large financial savings in sparsely populated rural areas. Sher and Tompkins (1977) argue that differences in transportation costs make comparisons impossible. They argue, "How can one compare the costs per student in an urban district in which students can walk to school with those in a district in which all students must be bused? Local conditions seem to make the cost figures incompatible."

Finally Sher (1988) asks, "How can one compare this economic concept to a

service such as schooling?" The economic term "efficiency" refers to the relationship between cost and quality. This concept refers to comparison of a product. Using this concept to compare schooling, rather than a product, can be a tricky business. He suggests that measurements of a school's efficiency are complicated by the absence of tangible outputs and standard definitions of quality in the world of education. He points out that it is very difficult to prove efficiency, in education especially "given both the paucity of outcome evidence and the inherent ambiguities of measuring 'yields' in service producing industries" (p.31). He further suggests that "crude comparisons of per pupil costs across districts are just that - crude - and largely meaningless in assessing actual efficiency"(p.32).

Sher (1988) concludes that we all need better rural schools, just as we need better urban schools, but we do not "need bigger schools in order to accomplish this goal" (p.52). Burlingame (1978) adds fuel to this argument in stating that advocates of consolidation believe small schools are "not only economically inefficient, but also inferior in creating educational opportunities for students which are essential to improving American society at large"(p.4). Doeksen and Peterson (1987), in their examination of education through the concept of economies of scale, found that a recommendation like consolidation is unlikely to solve the financial problems of schools.

The literature on economies of scale seems to suggest that the advocates of consolidation are people who are driven by reform banners, efficiency ratios, and political agendas that are difficult to deal with. It then takes a strong-minded community to resist educational overkill from policy makers.

School Size and Academic Achievement

Consolidation advocates, besides making the most of the economies of scale arguments, enlist school size and student achievement data as a means to close schools. The traditional fixation with size and academic achievement is synonymous with the words, “efficiency” and “quality”. The question of what is the best or the most efficient school size has been discussed for years, especially in rural areas.

As indicated previously the most influential recommendations on school size were made in 1959 by James Conant, as a result of a nationwide study in the United States. Conant recommended that no high school should have fewer than 100 in its graduating class because he was convinced that small schools were an unnecessary expense and students suffered academically by attending them. He recommended the elimination of small high schools by district reorganization because student achievement was one of the weaknesses identified as a common factor among smaller schools. It was (is) charged that students from small secondary schools don't perform as well academically than do those from large schools (Conant, 1959; *Structuring the*

Education System: A Public Consultation Paper for Educational Change in Newfoundland & Labrador, Government of Newfoundland & Labrador 1996). This prevailing attitude in our society for many years has built a belief that bigger schools are better schools. Such an attitude often instills a feeling of inferiority in students and guilt in their parents. Parents feel guilty (are made to feel guilty) for living in a small community and/or not agreeing to have their children bussed to larger schools. They are criticised for not giving their children all the opportunities (that a larger school can provide) they deserve.

Parents have to choose between maintaining a minimum high school program in their community or busing their children to a larger school that is able to offer a wider range of program options which would provide better opportunities for students (p. 5 of *Structuring the Education System: A Public Consultation Paper for Educational Change in Newfoundland & Labrador*).

This charge that small schools are academically inferior, is definitely debatable because a number of studies have shown that size makes little difference in student achievement.

Summers and Wolfe (1977) studied 627 elementary school students in Philadelphia public schools and concluded that school achievement was largely determined by socio-economic factors. Plecki (1991) examined both school size and urbanicity and concluded that there is no support for the notion that larger schools are

associated with improved student performance. Martellaro and Edington (1983), in their study of achievement data of 566 New Mexico schools, found that school size affected academic achievement when no other variables were considered. However, when the variables of Native American students, Spanish American students, mobility rate, per pupil expenditure, and pupil teacher ratio were considered, size was not significantly related to academic achievement.

Fowler and Walberg (1991) investigated school size and academic achievement in 293 public secondary schools in New Jersey and found that socio-economic status and the percentage of students from low-income families were the most influential factors related to achievement, not school size. Sher and Tompkins (1977) also point out that most early studies of the relationship between school size and academic achievement showed some degree of positive correlation between school size and student achievement. None of the studies, however, controlled for the intelligence or socio-economic class of the students in the schools. Marion, McLintire, and Walberg (1991) found that school size was negatively correlated with school-level achievement and educational attainment, when they controlled for the socio-economic status of students.

This overwhelming weight of research confirms that small schools are not a hindrance to student achievement. Yet, for over thirty years, educators and policy

makers have been pursuing a policy of consolidation, which has increased the average size of schools well beyond even those who are the strongest advocates of larger schools.

Program Comprehensiveness in Large Schools

The claim that school size and program breadth necessarily go hand in hand with higher academic achievement is not substantiated in the research literature. Conant (1967) argued simply that high school size was related to curricular offerings, and that to attain adequate offerings, high schools had to be of sufficient size. Monk (1987) found that courses in large high schools are not always advanced and very specialized, but may instead be restricted to introductory courses. Monk (1987) also found that only a small percentage of students in larger high schools enrolled in additional classes not available in small high schools. Haller, Monk, Bear, Griffith and Moss (1990) found that base science courses were offered by the majority of schools, regardless of size. Haller et al (1990) conclude:

That as schools get larger, they typically add advanced and alternate courses to their curricula. Relatively few schools lack the base course in a subject area, even among the very smallest. (p.117)

Monk (1987) suggests a small minority of students enroll in the advanced and alternate courses in a large school, and the principle effect of school consolidation was to permit a few students to enroll in those advanced and alternate courses. Haller et al

(1990) point out why then "should the state have an overriding interest in consolidation so that a few students can study calculus.... physics.... " (p.117-118).

The arguments advanced by educators who contend that consolidation provides wholesale curriculum exposure appears to fail empirical examination. The research doesn't appear to support consolidation arguments, yet, that seems irrelevant because vastly larger elementary and high schools are now the common experience of many students in the United States, England and Canada.

Better and More Accessible Facilities

Advocates of consolidation contend that students attending the receiving school will avail of gym and music programs. Through their involvement in extracurricular activities, their social domain would positively be affected. In short, students would become better citizens if they participated in those activities. Schoggen and Schoggen (1988) found that larger schools offered many and more varied activities than did small schools, but that a higher percentage of students in larger schools did not participate in any of the school extracurricular activities. Lindsay (1984), in his study to explore student participation in high school extracurricular activities, concluded that "students at smaller schools are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities" (p.79) He also concluded that socio-economic status and the distance between home and school were thought to influence participation. Holland and Andre (1987), in their extensive

literature review on extracurricular activities, concluded that higher levels of participation brought about higher levels of self-esteem in all participating students, but that small schools bring about more student participation in a greater number, especially for low-ability and low socio-economic status students.

The foregoing researchers sought to examine empirical studies on the conflicting questions surrounding consolidation. In the late 50's and early 60's Conant and his followers, with what many consider, insufficient research evidence, argued for high schools with a minimum size of 100 in the graduating class in order to achieve curricular adequacy; all else were considered inadequate.

Supporters of consolidation have over the years "sold" the idea of bussing students to larger schools on the belief that they would have access to all school program amenities. While parents listening to officials might have thought that it would be great for their children, the reality of many situations was somewhat different. Bussing students home after school was not a great way for them to participate in extra-curricular activities. Sometimes the idea of extra-curricular activities was just that - an idea.

The Politics of Consolidation

Walker (1977) suggests that our education system is not designed to facilitate the rights of the minority because the concept of liberal democracy is often missing in

local government and school board institutions. He says that it seems inherent that if representatives are elected from individual communities, their first priority is to protect the interests of that community and not the education of the district. By the very nature of representation by population, the good of the district becomes a vehicle for change for the good of the larger communities.

Sher (1977) offers another dimension to the democratic ideal when he suggests that often in the realm of progress, we set up to liberate the terribly cultural disadvantaged, but fail to recognize what rural communities and rural schools have as well as lack. He points out that the educational elite, over the course of the century, have put forward a series of theories and assumptions that have achieved wide acceptance among universities, governments, teachers and the public alike. Those theories and assumptions are revealed in a desire to save the rural, coastal and isolated areas of the world from slipping further behind their urban cousins. In North America and Europe this call is imbedded into a vehicle that purports success and prosperity, and that vehicle is consolidation.

The consolidation vehicle is still working in its ceaseless motion onward. If small schools have remained open, it was and is the intent and goal to reshape them into miniature replicas of urban schools. Sher (1977) indicates that this policy has gained universal appeal and has engendered support from government, policy officials

and teachers. The result has been urban standards, textbooks, and urban-trained teachers which have all been seen to rescue rural schools by rejecting their unique character and heritage. Sher (1977) points out that urban educators appear to be obsessed with saving rural students from their parents and rural parents from themselves. Consolidation, according to urban trained professionals, would result in better supervision, specialized teachers, broader curriculum, more extra-curricular and expanded resources for our schools.

However, according to Sher (1977) consolidation is implemented primarily because of a,

consensus among influential policy makers that it represents a reform of enormous potential for solving most of the problems considered endemic to rural education. (p.44)

This concept has never been successfully challenged in literature and the impetus for consolidation almost always comes from outside the rural community, and very seldom the rural school and community itself.

In Ontario, according to Marshall (1985), although school closure policy exists, rarely is the intent followed. The views of the community are usually ignored and that parents' involvement is usually a reaction to the closure, not a part of the process.

Galton and Patrick (1990) further state that arising out of current educational debate, consolidation "is often characterized by strong passions and tends to involve

rhetoric and emotion rather than evidence "(p.3). Galton and Patrick (1990) also point out that justification for school consolidation is usually made on the basis of either reducing cost or increasing educational quality, or both simultaneously, and very seldom are the good educational practices occurring in a small school assessed. Still, each year school boards all across the country continue to consolidate schools. Most closures seem to become emotional affairs as parents and communities are less willing to accept district claims of "bigger is better" or "reorganized is more efficient," and strongly resist any movements to close their schools.

There is a tremendous range of school closing scenarios. However, all seem to be characterized by a continued preoccupation with school size and the quest for educational equality. Research findings point to the fact that rarely does a school remain open once the original intent was closure. Marshall (1985) states that school boards,

do not need assistance in the process of closing a school, but assistance in conflict management. The underlying reason for conflict between school boards and small communities lies in the very nature of schooling itself.(p.12)

Berry (1990) writes that local schools no longer serve the community, but the government's economy. He states that the purpose of education today is to prepare people to take their places in the industrial economy, an industrial economy far

removed from most rural communities. This he states concocts up the assumption that small is obsolete, and that the premise of education is the way "up" and up is the direction from small to big. Essentially, this causes us to educate our children to leave home, not to stay home. Berry (1990) suggests that it is from this conceptual ideology that small communities all across North America are being faced with the closure of their small schools.

What Berry suggests may basically be *true*. Is it a truism that lacking an authentic local culture, a place becomes open to exploitation and destruction from the urban mosaic? Is it this reason why school closures become couched in jargon, rhetoric and emotional intensity?

Tyack (1974) says that in the eyes of early reformers, opportunity for rural youth meant uniform regulations as it does today. However, the ultimate goal of those regulations was the deliberate shifting of power from the lay people to the professionals. He writes:

behind slogans that mask power-like 'keep the schools out of politics'- and myths that rationalize inequality- like the doctrines of ethnic inferiority- lie institutional systems called schools that often reinforce injustice for some at the same time that they offered advancement for others (p.4).

Tyack (1974) comments that during the 19th century and the politics of pluralism,

"schoolmen" saw lay decision making "at its best inefficient meddling" in the proper province of the expert: at its worst the school system became just another source of patronage..." (p.79). In the politics of consolidation today, is this still the same scenario?

When the school goes, does the community follow? Is the loss of local culture and local control, a complement of losing a small school, or as Peshkin (1982) puts it, close a school and a community bleeds? Nachtigal (1982) points out that rural communities are not "miniature versions of cities; they have different characteristics and different needs"(p.12). He points out that small schools have always been considered the weakest link in the educational system, and again, today are being hit because of declining enrollments, limited resources, and the increasing demand for accountability. Nachtigal (1982) also says that a model of schooling from the past was only marginally appropriate for rural areas, in the best of conditions and today new proposed models may become untenable. Are we to suffer for the sins of the past and not be able to develop models that promote successful small rural educational schooling? Or as this author is suggesting, will school consolidation and its educational policies, continue to be vaporized by a combination of ideology and nostalgia? The truth begs for more empirical evidence and sound analysis.

Are we to believe that all small rural schools elicit unequal opportunities

and educational stagnation that would be solved by large urban schools? Are we also to believe that all students in rural areas are somehow backward citizens? Can a small community fight and win against school board officials armed with statistics, professional expertise and the power of the legislature?

Faith Dunne (1982; cited in Nachtigal, 1982) in her examination of Alden, Iowa seems to suggest that this may be possible. She points out that most school consolidation proposals arrive from the outside in the form of government intervention, thus putting the communities affected in a reactive, and not a proactive situation.

Dunne (1982), in her case history of PURE (People United for Rural Education), suggests that if consolidation is to be resisted, the resistance must originate from a proactive position. She also emphasizes that the specific qualities of Alden and rural Iowa appear to be synonymous in an effective approach to disrupt consolidation. Those specific qualities include a certain amount of affluence: direct affluence of wealth and indirect affluence of a good physical plant, students who are highly motivated and supported at home, test scores that are comparable to state-wide scores, and quality leadership. Dunne's case study evolved over only four years, and in her final assessment she declares "that the expenditure of the last four years left the original core group thoroughly exhausted" (p.205).

The questions forthcoming are: Can communities with poor to medium physical

schools succeed ? Can communities who perform poorly on CTBS (Canadian Tests of Basic Skills) succeed? Can communities without quality leadership succeed? Can communities without economic affluence succeed? Is there an organizational model or ideology to circumvent consolidation?

Nachtigal (1982) concludes that this may not be possible until we move toward a more differentiated policy of rural school improvement. The first step in this action would be to redefine the problems of rural education. This redefinition is a two-step process: first, in who defines the problems, and second, by what criteria. Historically, he contends, that the problems of rural education have been defined by educational leaders of an urbanized profession.

Cubberly in 1914 (cited in Nachtigal, 1982) was speaking from this viewpoint when he said that rural schools were in a "state of arrested development" (Nachtigal 1982, p.302). Conant in the late 60's, and early 70's, was reflecting the same when he called for large comprehensive high schools as the answer to educational problems, be they rural or urban. Over time the "arrested development" scenario and Conant's contention of larger schools was reflected in an apparent natural predilection in Canada, especially Newfoundland, toward larger schools.

Conclusions

This review sought to examine the conflicting claims of consolidation. Some thirty years ago, with inadequate evidence, Conant argued for high schools with a minimum size of 100 in its graduating class in order to achieve curricular efficiency. Others argued for the merits of the small school. However, the proponents of the larger school appear to have succeeded and this thesis, in the following chapters, will seek to explore two school closures in an effort to witness what actually occurred.

The review found evidence to support that economy of scale was not automatic in school consolidation and that diseconomies of scale were apparent when all variables other than student expenditure and student/teacher ratio were considered. Size alone does not guarantee a comprehensive curriculum in any subject area, and that the breadth and depth of the curriculum in small schools compare very favourably with larger schools. Simply put, there is no empirical evidence to support Conant's thesis. The review informed us that although larger schools offer advanced and alternative courses, few students elected to participate in those courses and that basic academic courses exist among even the smallest high school (Klonsky (1995), p. 3; Sher (1988). Should public policy entertain such an expense, when small schools can offer the basics of any curriculum?

The review concluded that participation in extra-curricular activities was not

conclusively attached to large schools. In fact, because of busing and socio-economic status fewer students participated from outlying areas. What this review pointed to was that, in small schools, few students are available for many activities and the student who would be considered marginal in other larger, environments receives entree to participate. In so doing the marginal student becomes more like his "desirable" counterparts in larger schools.

Student achievement also was, on average, higher in small schools. This was also found to be particularly true of poorly achieving students (perhaps in the same way as "marginal " students in small schools participate more). Therefore, we have an existing paradox in education and that paradox should be addressed.

Chapter III Methodology

This study aims to provide insight into the problems, controversy, and complexities of community opposition that has accompanied or developed around school closures in two specific communities in Newfoundland. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theory behind the study, and the procedure which was followed in collecting and reporting data. This is a qualitative study and the data is reported in a narrative fashion, including direct quotations from the participants. It is hoped that such an approach will provide not only the data collected but also some insight into how communities organize, under the contexts of leadership and protest in relation to an impending school closure. Furthermore, a history of education in the communities will be compiled to establish a basic foundation of education and reflect on how this may or may not have reflected on the school closure.

Qualitative Research

This study is theoretically based on symbolic interactionism. According to Biklen (1992), it was present in the Chicago School approach to research in the early part of this century, in such notable personages as John Dewey, Robert Park and Charles Horton Cooley. Fundamental to this paradigm is the assumption that human experience is mediated by interpretation. Blumer (1969) says that objects, people and

situations do not process their own meaning; rather, meaning is conferred on them. This means that reality can change from group to group depending on how the groups interact and the symbolic meaning which they attribute to objects and events. An event, a protest, or a presentation dealing with a specific phenomena may disclose a reality absolutely different for the participants involved. Reality for parents may be quite different than reality for school board members, superintendents and government. Therefore, human interactions, within this context, and attribution of meaning are such a complex field of study, that it is best suited to study with an open-ended, qualitative approach, which will allow freedom for participants to express their conceptions of reality.

Jacobs and Razavieh, (1990) stated that qualitative research takes a fundamental premise that:

social reality..... cannot be reduced to variables in the same manner as physical reality, and what is most important in the social disciplines is understanding and portraying the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved in particular social settings or events (p.445).

According to Biklen (1992) qualitative inquiry emphasizes the subjective aspects of people's behaviour and its "attempts to gain entry into the conceptual world of its subjects." (p.34)

Therefore, a qualitative method of inquiry was chosen for this study because it

deals with human interactions and because of its subjective nature. The study is inquiring into community opposition to impending school consolidation.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) stated that qualitative methods are better suited to studying multiple realities because they are more sensitive to the shaping realities and value patterns that are met by both the researcher and the participants. A qualitative approach allows for a more open-ended inquiry and as Merriam (1989) points out, qualitative methods have no predetermined hypotheses to limit or direct them, therefore allowing discoveries to be made about the phenomenon under investigation.

The data collecting method in this study was the focused interview. Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) established this method whereby the investigator allows the respondent considerable latitude to express his or her own definition of the situation or event, not simply answering the interviewer's questions about it. This type of interview focuses on the subject's experiences concerning the situation under study.

Siedman (1991) contends that:

the purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate but in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience." (p.3)

Fundamental to the focused interview is open-ended questions where the respondent answers as he or she wishes with some probing on the part of the

interviewer. Schutz (1967) contends that it is never possible to understand another totally, but recognizing those limits in our understanding of others, we can strive to understand them by understanding their actions. Therefore, verbatim responses from the participants were used extensively in the reporting to present their thoughts as objectively as possible to enhance the narrative of what occurred in those cases of school consolidation.

Communities in the Study

The communities that are the focus of this study are small rural communities in Newfoundland. Clayback Cove currently has a population of about 100 and Sheltered Harbour has a population of about 218 (both communities have been given fictitious names). Those rural communities had an economy based primarily on the fishery, but since the declaration of the federal government to close the cod fishery in Newfoundland, most of the people are receiving TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy) benefits as compensation for closing the fishery.

Those communities housed primary/elementary schools until they were closed in 1991 and 1993. Both communities offered educational programs from Kindergarten through Grade six, with special education components attached. Clayback Cove's student population at the time of closure was 18 and Sheltered Harbour had a student population of 22.

Closure history began in the fall of 1990, when School Board District #122 met and decided that both schools would be closed. In the case of Sheltered Harbour this was accomplished in one year and in the case of Clayback Cove, the school closed in 1993. Multi-grade classrooms were the standard in those schools. The usual configuration of classes in the school were Kindergarten, Grades one and two together and Grades three, four, five and six together. Neither school had a gymnasium, but both schools offered a basic music program, had access to 486 hard drive computers in the school, and Sheltered Harbour offered a physical education program in the community centre about five minutes' walk from the school. Clayback Cove had 2.5 teaching units and Sheltered Harbour had 3 teaching units at the time of closure. Each school had .5 teaching units for special education and challenging needs. Both Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour had small libraries in their schools. Essentially, those communities were slated for study because they were consolidated and were considered small by Newfoundland's definition of a small school.

Collection of Data

The bulk of data in this study was collected through focused interviews conducted with individuals who were actively involved in the school consolidation process. Those individuals were identified by reviewing school board documentation

of those consolidations, eliciting recurring names from that documentation, discussion with the superintendents involved and by visiting the two communities where the schools had closed. The communities informally identified specific individuals; namely parents, superintendents, teachers, former teachers and school board chairpersons. School board documentation of minutes of meetings, correspondence between parents and school boards, and presentations and petitions by parents to the school board were also used as data. Letters and presentations from protesting communities were retyped for confidentiality reasons. Also local newspaper accounts were used. However, the local newspaper accounts cannot be cited because the School Board would be identifiable from this documentation.

Those individuals who were interviewed were approached informally at first, with the researcher explaining what the research was generally about. Then each individual was contacted by telephone and an interview time was arranged. Prior to the interview each participant was given a letter to read which fully explained the purpose of the study and informing them that the interview was totally voluntary. Each participant signed a declaration indicating that confidentiality was paramount in this study and at no time would individuals, schools or communities be identified.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participant's home, sometimes with the whole family listening to the interview. Questions were posed by the

interviewer to initiate discussion and maintain the focus of the interview, but participants were encouraged to talk freely about their school closure. The questions asked were semi-structured, but provided open-ended opportunities for participants to mention and focus on any perceptions which they had on school consolidation and education in general. The researcher didn't restrict interviews to a specific number of individuals, but set out to interview all significant individuals involved. The researcher was unable to contact one school board chairman who had moved to British Columbia. Attempts were made to contact him by fax and telephone but to no avail. Two significant parents were unable to be interviewed because they and their families had moved to Alberta and the North West Territories.

Data Analysis

All names, communities and any other language that might identify individuals, communities and school boards were assigned pseudonyms for anonymity. Transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded for common themes, issues and concerns for the participants involved using Ethnograph, a software program for coding qualitative data. Key words and themes like declining enrollment, transportation, programming, weather, economy, money, meeting, conflict, busing, allocation, rumour, better, were used. The program Ethnograph picked out all instances where those concepts occurred in the

transcription and then the researcher was able to code those instances. The purpose of this technique was to organize and tighten up the data for further assessment. Ethnograph was used, only, to organize data. Ethnograph analysis was not used in data analysis.

Conclusion

Before proceeding with a study it is fundamental to be familiar with work that has been done in that field, or closely related fields, by other researchers. Some studies exist on the fallout of school consolidation, but no studies were found that traces the full narrative of school consolidation in small rural schools. Similar studies have been approached in small school consolidation, looking at economic cost, better programming and the politics of consolidation. The literature review chapter explored some of this research done in the field of small schools and school consolidation.

Chapter IV Introduction to Case Histories

Clayback Cove, Sheltered Harbour, St. Thomas, Darby, St. Augustine and District 122 are pseudonyms for the actual school board and communities in this study. Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour were two communities slated, as part of a declaration by District 122, in the fall of 1990, to close/consolidate five of its small schools.

Two of the communities slated for closure, offered little resistance to consolidation; one school still continues to operate, whereas Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour schools were closed and students were bused to St. Thomas and Darby, respectively. Both communities mounted opposition to the proposed closures and were unsuccessful in keeping their schools. Similar oppositional strategies were employed by both communities, yet differences in employment are prominent in their case histories.

Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour, in the years previous, had been party to rumours of their schools being closed. Nothing came of those rumours, until the fall of 1990, when it became apparent that this time, they were real. Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour residents responded with a resounding “No” to the proposal.

According to the participants in this study, in the fall of 1990, the Deputy Minister of the Newfoundland Department of Education allegedly issued a statement

to all boards in Newfoundland, asking them to look at all small schools and to advise why they are not being closed. School District 122, during that fall of 1990, slated five small primary and elementary schools in the district for closure. The reasons for consolidation reported to parents were as follows:

1. The Department of Education (Government) asked boards in the fall of 1990 to look at small schools and to advise why they are not being closed.
2. The Department of Education is advising Boards that there will be a possible freeze in Government funding or maybe even a 10% reduction in funding.
3. The Department of Education's most recent indications are that our Board (District 122) is likely to have its teacher allocations reduced by 5 this year.
4. Therefore, there is a need to look at restructuring as enrollment declines just to keep the present level of programming for students.
5. Rather than just keeping the present level of programming we should be adding programs for students.
6. Students from small schools moved to larger schools can receive as many programs or more programs in some cases than they could in the small schools.
7. Moving students to larger schools enables fewer grades per teacher.
8. Larger schools can provide more social growth for students.
9. There can be a more effective deployment of teaching personnel by having fewer schools.
10. Enrollments are declining; this will mean (a) There will be less money to run the schools.

(b) There will be fewer teachers for the district.
11. Transportation is improving.
12. Money can be used more economically through combining schools.

(Source: From an overhead presentation to the people of Sheltered Harbour, from District 122 officials, fall, 1990)

The two superintendents, involved in the consolidation process, Mr. Roger Meadows and Dr. Kevin Gerard, were asked specifically about the reported directive from the Department of Education to close small schools. Each indicated no knowledge of such direction. As Mr. Meadows stated,

not to my recollection, not specifically. We did it at board office level, in terms of loss of teachers and in turn the loss of programming in certain schools.

The second superintendent, also, responded, "No, I must say I don't recall anything coming from the Deputy Minister." However, in a presentation to the board, from residents of Sheltered Harbour, it is given credence again, but the statement is qualified as quoting the deputy minister out of context. It reads:

The Deputy Minister of Education was quoted as saying, 'If there are small schools open where there are nearby larger schools, give me reasons why they are still open.' This was the opening remark made by Mr. Meadows (superintendent) at Sheltered Harbour. In talking to government officials, I've been told the Deputy Minister's words were taken out of context. When he said a unified system would help keep common schools, he didn't mean 'go out and close every small school in the province.' But this Board seems to have taken what he said literally.

(Source: Presentation from the people of Sheltered Harbour to District 122, March, 1991)

This is the beginning of the controversy surrounding school consolidation in Clayback

Cove and Sheltered Harbour, and the political shroud that sometimes cloak consolidation and school closures.

This allows us a window from which to view the two narrative chapters on the actual event(s) of the two closure cases, which will follow.

Clayback Cove: Case History

Clayback Cove is a small Newfoundland community ranged above a small cove, giving it little shelter from the open ocean and little level land for homes, but it offers the closest access to the fishing grounds in the area. Clayback Cove is typical of most small communities in the area; settled close to the sea because it was the sea that supplied peoples' livelihood. Clayback Cove relied heavily on the cod fishery for its existence.

According to *The Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* (1994), Clayback Cove began as a minor French fishing station before it was settled by Newfoundland fishermen sometime in the early 1860's. The community first appears in the census of 1874, with a population of 84.

In 1996, sixteen homes still cluster around the small inlet about 100 metres wide. Today, the homes are modern and resemble any suburban community in Newfoundland. Vinyl siding, manicured lawns and picket fences are common. As I

arrived for the first time, on this cold November morning, chimneys are fingering wood smoke up, and the northeast wind is throwing it back on the rocks and cliffs. There are no trees here, no tuckamoors, no brambles or bushes; just rocks and lichens. It seems desolate, but warm for some reason. From my truck window, I notice a small child's footprint in the snow on the edge of the road. It tells me children live here, but they no longer go to school here. In 1993, three years ago, the students were bused to a larger school in St. Thomas.

Two days before I arrived here, I talked to Peter, a former teacher, about Clayback Cove and its schooling. Peter, who arrived in 1973, saw Clayback Cove, as a community not typical of Newfoundland communities of the early 1970's, but maybe typical of a 1950's community. He relates:

I came to Clayback Cove in 1973. On arriving in St. Thomas, I stayed overnight, because there was no connection by boat from Clayback Cove to St. Thomas. The next day, I was picked up by a resident of Clayback Cove by motorboat. At that time, there were approximately 100-150 people living there, comprising about 25 families. I was the only teacher there at the time and my assignment was to teach Kindergarten to Grade Seven. I think the school enrollment was about 20 students at that time. The community itself had no electricity, one mobile phone, and no running water except during the summer, that was a hose running across the ground from a spring just outside the community. There were no roads around the community, just paths connecting all the homes. The people were solely fisherman. All incomes were derived from the cod fishery.

Peter suggests that Clayback Cove was a product of the 1960's resettlement plan;

because it resisted pressures to resettle, it didn't have the facilities and amenities of a typical rural Newfoundland community in the 1970's. Peter concludes that,

In the late 1960's the Clayback Cove people dug their heels in and were not going to be resettled. They were not going to move for governments, nobody. Other communities similar to Clayback Cove, in this area did resettle in St. Thomas and elsewhere. Clayback Cove would not. They had their own identity, their own values and they thought this was their community. There were some elderly people living there at the time and they refused to move. They refused to leave and they held out. They were still holding out when I arrived. All the houses were fairly old and no road. However, that fall a road came through. They felt that if they held out long enough, eventually things would happen. They took a strong stand and would not move. The government recognized that they were not moving and eventually they got electricity and a new breakwater. They got the things they waited for. When I arrived they were holding out for a new school.

Clayback Cove did get its new school in 1982, but the school that Peter taught at in 1973 was about 40 years old and in a dilapidated condition. This school also served as a chapel and was the centre for weddings, card games and meetings, a school, a church and a community centre.

Peter describes the students as just like any other kids, eager to learn and vibrant. However, Peter recognized that the majority of parents envision,

... their children as people who would be graduating high school. The expectation was for students to get Grade Nine and that would be it. The major deterrent to getting a high school education at this time, was leaving the community and going to St. Thomas to finish high school. High school

education was available to the residents of Clayback Cove until the onslaught of the resettlement program in the 1960's. High school accreditation would no longer be offered, students would have to go to St. Thomas for high school. The government decided that only Grade kindergarten to nine would be offered in Clayback Cove.

Students were being educated in Clayback Cove since its permanent settlement in the early 1860's. Initially, schooling was sporadic and a temporary school was in an individual's house. A firm date was unable to be fixed, but a school was constructed at Clayback Cove sometime in the late 1800's. One resident said that his father was born in 1912 and went to school in Clayback Cove. He is certain that a school was there before that time. The highest level, then, was Grade Six *Royal Reader* but most people didn't avail of this, as most of the boys went fishing at an early age and most young girls stayed at home to help with all the household chores, or were married and began to raise families of their own.

This is typical of education in rural Newfoundland in the early to middle 1900's, but as Peter indicated above, still in the 1970's parents weren't expecting their children to go beyond grade 9 because they had to leave home to do so. They had to go to St. Thomas, initially for Grade 10 and 11, and eventually, the Grade 9's went, then the Grade 8's, and when Peter arrived in 1973, his assignment was to teach Kindergarten to Grade seven. Clayback Cove residents felt some animosity against St. Thomas and the urban values it adhered to.

St. Thomas is the business and service centre for the local area. Today, its approximate population is 3200. St. Thomas has a regional hospital, a regional high school and an elementary school. A number of small businesses are situated in St. Thomas: two furniture stores, a car dealership, restaurants, a shopping mall, an arena, two snowmobile dealerships, a local newspaper, Kinsmen and Lions Clubs, two motels, craft stores, a fish plant and the general malaise of any urban centre in Newfoundland.

As previously mentioned, in the 1960's and early 1970's, isolated communities like Clayback Cove were asked by the Government of Newfoundland to relocate to "growth centres" like St. Thomas. Other communities in the area, similar to Clayback Cove, moved; Clayback Cove refused.

During this time, the Newfoundland government began to consolidate all neighbouring schools in the larger urban centres, and to construct regional elementary and high schools for the more rural isolated centres. It was government's intention to then bus students from outlying areas into those regional schools. However, the transportation network in many rural areas was often non-existent and at best inefficient, so busing was not an option until the roads were built and/or improved.

The Newfoundland government, then, initiated a bursary program and students were paid \$50.00 a month, for board and lodging, to attend school in those "growth centre" communities. Here they could pursue a grade eleven education.

The result for Clayback Cove residents was that only Grade one to Grade nine would be offered in Clayback Cove. If you wanted to pursue a Grade eleven, students would have to attend school in St. Thomas. Some went, but most stayed. If you went to school in St. Thomas from Clayback Cove, you walked the 15 kilometres or went the 8 kilometres by boat.

John, probably the first resident of Clayback Cove to graduate from grade 11, remembers leaving school on Fridays in St. Thomas and walking the distance to Clayback Cove. On Sunday afternoon, if it was too stormy to go by boat, he would return again overland. Sometimes he would get a ride for seven of those kilometres because a road was recently constructed to the next community during his school years. But he did have to walk eight kilometres no matter what. John says,

No, you had to walk. Every week-end as soon as the school bell rang, usually around 4 O'clock, we were on the footpath and we would stay home until Sunday evening and leave to walk back to St. Thomas again. It was about 10 kilometres and sometimes we got a ride because there was a road for about five kilometres to another community, but a lot of the times I had to walk all the way. I finished high school in 1966 and came back to go fishing.

John's cousin, Sarah, spent two years in Grade nine because she didn't want to go to school in St. Thomas. Most students, however, finished their Grade nine and stayed in Clayback Cove. Some went to St. Thomas for one or two years but quit school and returned home to go fishing.

When a road was completed in 1973, Clayback Cove residents were connected to St. Thomas and the rest of Newfoundland. All students, who were on a bursary in St. Thomas could now live home and be bused to school in St. Thomas. At this time, all St. Thomas neighbourhood schools were amalgamated into one large high school. Now the Grade eight and nine students from Clayback Cove would join their fellow students who were already in St. Thomas on bursary. Clayback Cove now had a school housing Kindergarten to Grade seven.

In the early 70's, Clayback Cove school had a population approximating 24 students, with one teacher. The community was asking for a new school building and for those same years the government was encouraging them to move to St. Thomas or another growth centre of their choice. Peter says the old building he taught in was "dilapidated and badly in need of repair."

This fight lasted for nine years and in 1982 the IEC (Integrated Education Council) gave approval for a new building. Funding for the new school would be split at 90% cost to the IEC and the local District would pay the remaining 10%. Clayback Cove residents were delighted. However, they were informed that the local school board couldn't pay its 10%, therefore, the school couldn't be constructed. The community responded, without hesitation, to construct the building free of cost and to use their labour as the 10% required by the local Board.

John related the following information:

Well, the community, in lieu of the down payment that the school board was supposed to provide, we would work in the time as free labour to come up to the cost of the down-payment. We were 100% in favour of doing this to get a new school. All the people got behind it and worked in the number of required hours. Everybody worked in their amount of hours, which totalled the down-payment. That was in 1982.

In the spring of 1982 the new school building was opened. The school was built from the labour of the community free of charge. The IEC supplied the materials and the community built the school. The school was now offering programs from kindergarten to grade six, because sometime between 1973 and 1982 the grade seven students were also bused to St. Thomas. Furthermore, Clayback Cove school procured an extra full-time teaching unit and a 1/2 unit for special needs. This status quo remained amidst rumours that each year a unit may have to be taken and the school closed.

In the fall of 1990 (a span of eight years), Rev. Stewart Maxwell told the community that Clayback Cove residents may see their school closed after this year and their children bused to St. Thomas. Mary, a long-time community resident with a challenging needs child, remembers it as:

I guess it was from our minister. Well, he's on the school board, he is the chairman, I think. I guess it was through him we found out first, and then the school board. We heard rumours in the beginning, there was all kinds

of stories floating around and you didn't know what to believe. People were telling you this and that. We said that the school was not going to close, no matter what.

Clayback Cove residents reacted with a resounding “no” to the proposed closure. John remembers saying because we couldn't stand the thought of sending little children to St. Thomas all day on the bus. According to John, the first thing we did was circulate a petition, with every resident's signature on that petition. They gave the petition to Rev. Maxwell (their parish priest) to present to the board.

The board superintendent responded by sending a memo to the principal of Clayback Cove school, indicating that a meeting was to be held in the coming weeks to discuss the status of the school for the coming 1991-1992 school year. This memo was issued on January 18, 1991.

This meeting was held on March 6, 1991. In attendance from the board were the superintendent, the principal of St. Thomas Elementary, the business manager and a co-ordinator. The superintendent made a presentation on the merits of closing the school. He cited better educational opportunities, more programs (music and gym), reduction in funding from the government for overall board finances, declining enrollments and the need for restructuring just to keep the current level of programming for students. School board money could be used more economically through combining schools.

Mr. Meadows, the superintendent, in his discussion, with the author, felt that

programming and declining enrollments were the main reasons for considering closing schools in general. In Clayback Cove, he indicates that,

... from Clayback Cove to St. Thomas, it was only 12 km, and we had far more programs to offer the students than they could get in their hometown. Some of the students, especially the challenging needs, would get better programming in St. Thomas. Those are the basic reasons we looked at Clayback Cove school for consolidation. We felt the social aspects of busing would not be as big a problem as it was perceived to be. Busing was a big concern for parents, understandably for young children. The highways were always on call 24 hours. We never had any problems from the time I was superintendent until now, with bussing high school students. We couldn't foresee any problems bussing younger children. The programming was the overriding factor in closing Clayback Cove school.

Clayback Cove parents, at this meeting, raised questions about their concerns with the student-teacher ratio at St. Thomas Elementary, the adverse weather conditions during the winter, the fact that Clayback Cove students at the St. Thomas High School were not being treated fairly and the lack of canteen services at St. Thomas Elementary. There was a general emphatic response that, "We will not let this school be closed."

Mr. Meadows informed the parents that other factors beyond his control, may determine the future of Clayback Cove school remaining open. It all hinged on the provincial budget that was to be tabled in the House of Assembly on the next day March 7, 1991. In response to the parents' question on meal preparation, he then promised the parents a hot lunch program if their students went to St. Thomas

Elementary the following year. This meeting ended with informal discussion of the merits and demerits of closing schools. Five days later, March 12, 1991, the board made its official statement in a memo to parents that Clayback Cove school would close on June 21, 1991.

On March 14, 1991 , the parents of Clayback Cove responded with a letter of protest to the board, outlining reasons why the school should remain open. The complete text of the letter is reproduced below. It is an important historical document that illustrates how a community attempts to articulate how it values its small school and what the school means to them in terms of their children's education:

Letter Of Petition From Clayback Cove

To the chairman and board members:

We the people of Clayback Cove have met in concern for the future of our school. For those who are new and unacquainted with our school we provide a little background information.

The school at Clayback Cove was built in 1982. At the time a 10% down-payment was required. Since the school board could not fund it, the people here agreed to contribute in the form of free-labour.

The structure is one of the best in the district with its cost of operation in 1989-1990 around \$6000.00 compared to other similar schools where costs of operation double that figure. Bearing in mind the low cost coupled with other factors we feel that the school should remain open.

The following is a list of reasons:

1. Students in lower grades will be the only ones that will not be bused home for lunch break.
2. We have one of the worst roads to travel in winter.
3. Cafeteria services haven't been up to standard at the high school. We don't expect them to be any different at the elementary school.
4. It cost \$3-4 dollars per student per day for a student to attend school in St. Thomas. Fear is rising that students may be caused to drop out due to parents financial inability to cope.
5. Supplies in items like television, VCR, duplicator, etc, has been accumulated through the efforts of students, parents and the teachers in the way of walk-a thons and the like.
6. We feel that the board can save money by cutting staff at the board office. Mr..... stated in the meeting of March th that with consolidation, board staff can remain as is for three years. If so, we feel that the board are more concerned with staff jobs than student safety and education.

In relationship with the reasons given above and the well-being of our children, it is very disturbing and not to be taken lightly by anyone. We strongly feel that it is too early an age to take children away from their family and community to be alone tending for themselves. Years of research in child rearing and counselling very vividly points out that children must not be left alone. Instead they need the closest possible guidance-communication relationship with the parents. While it may be true that children can adapt to certain situations at an early age, what about the final product? We believe that when a child becomes aware that he/she is alone, bad influences can take root and grow and be very damaging to the child's possible true character. With brief reference to the ever popular high school novel "Lord of the Flies" is the prime

example of what can happen when children and parents are separated at such an early age. This is a very vulnerable, tender and impressionable age and we feel that it's at this point in time in a child's life he/she can begin to imitate the characteristics most impressive to him.

We feel that the small community school can be an excellent stepping stone to higher education and plays a vital role in building strong character if used in the proper acceleration with higher steps in the system. A child can reflect that there are indeed changes that he/she must adapt to in life. That he will come face to face with different people in authority, rules and regulations. We believe that at this point in time the changes can be made without endangering the sense of accomplishment and that from the new set of circumstances the child can derive a sense of fulfilment in what he/she is doing.

We believe that our case is very strongly supported by Ms. Mary Craig's assessment of "Teaching in the 90's" in the March th issue of the local newspaper. Ms. Craig went back to the time when things were much different. Back to the time when, and we quote "mom was there to greet them when they arrived home from school." Very important, and believe it or not, especially at lunch hour, something our children will be deprived of.

Ms. Craig goes on to say, quote, "The absence of parent from the home through work or socialising are some of the problems that have taken a toll on the children." May we ask, what is the difference between having the parents away from home than sending the children away from home too early in life? This article also states, quote: "Some children feel secure, loved, wanted, motivated and encouraged while others feel rejected abused, hungry, neglected and apathetic."

Pray, tell us, how would a four or five year old child feel when left to fend for himself among several hundred other children, most of which he/she had not seen the sky over before? Will he feel secure, loved, wanted, motivated and encouraged? Or will he feel rejected, abused, hungry, neglected and apathetic? We feel that nobody really and truly has the answer. So why must we be expected to gamble with the future social

well-being of even just one child?

Ms. Craig in her unique and timely assessment goes on to say and we quote: "More parents need to take back their responsibility of child rearing. They need to place greater emphasis on spending time with their children to motivate them to help them feel that they are indeed wanted and loved. No one can replace the influence of a child's parents, their primary teacher."

Very well put by Ms. Craig and right in tune with, if I may, "The code of ethics of child rearing." However, we feel what the school board and the Dept. of Education has proposed is in deep conflict with it. We the people of Clayback Cove believe that we do have a great sense of value in our children's future. This is one of the most important reasons why we want school continued in our community. Our plea is to have our children at home in their own community longer and help them through some of the most tender and the most influential years of their lives.

We feel grounds to rebuttal can only come from a system whose integrity is very questionable and at stake. In view of the rumblings heard over the years which as continued on to this present day, such might be the case.

Economically speaking, we feel that closing the school here is no justification for viability. It may be sufficient to say, we feel that we are being taken on a roller coaster ride for mere convenience, profit and greed. We – Sacrifice Not – the future social well-being of our children for neither.

Just one more point in closing, to any, who are involved, Clayback Cove, Sheltered Harbour and wherever exist only in name. Can a vote that will change the course of history in these communities, be properly executed without any prior knowledge of the ways of life and the inner activities thereof?

To encumber the above letter of protest with extensive commentary and analysis would be an injustice to the letter itself. However, it is apparent, from the letter, that

the parents of Clayback Cove sought ownership and control over the influences in their children's lives. They felt the need to be a part of their children's lives and schooling as long as possible. They were very concerned, not only for their children's safety, but the social and psychological affects that busing students away from home may have had on their children.

The school board, on the other hand, was operating from the position of declining enrollment, government cutbacks, and a belief system that programming was deficient in Clayback Cove school because of multi-grade classrooms and the fact that the school lacked in gym, science, computer, and music facilities.

It was now official, the school was slated to close that coming June (1991), and the battle lines were drawn. The school board had made it official and the community was saying no.

Schools do not become closed or consolidated on the basis of formal discussions or official decrees between school boards and parents alone. Linked to those formal discussions are many informal actions that become intertwined in the official debate to consolidate schools. Two distinctive value clashes were now emerging and being debated on the public stage. The result was that political agendas were born out of this debate and as politics entered the arena, it becomes a win/lose situation. The values and agendas of the school board and its officials were pitted against the values and the

political agendas of the community. All members bring to a public debate parts of themselves. They all bring a world view that they have experienced and to which they adhere. On the one hand, we are dealing with people whose world view exists in Clayback Cove and surrounding areas, a view that consists of cooperation, consensus and community solidarity. On the other hand, superintendents, teachers, and school board officials have experiences and knowledge that reflect a world view of efficiency, equity and majority rule. We should also recognize that the board comes with authority sanctioned by government, whereas the community must establish its authority and power in the face of losing it's school. It becomes an "us" and "them" situation.

Peter, who transferred to St. Thomas in 1987, was the last teacher to live in Clayback Cove. The teachers who replaced him lived in St. Thomas and commuted to Clayback Cove each day. He remembers some parents relating to him that the school atmosphere had changed after he had left. He recalls:

I was in Clayback Cove for 15 years. I felt a little guilty for leaving. I felt that I betrayed the community for leaving, that's the kind of relationship I had with the community. But they understood, it was time for me to seek a change. I still think it was done with some sadness. It was hard for me to part ways. They were a little apprehensive of who was going to follow me. I'm not trying to pump myself up, but that was the sense I got. They thought they would be getting a teacher for one year, another the next year and so on. They felt that their children would experience some instability, as a result. I believe that with my effort and the parents behind their students, we were doing well. They were leaving

Clayback Cove and going to St. Thomas in Grade seven, graduating and going of to college, nursing and university. This was the first time, that this was happening. They pointed out to the board that this was a good thing. Why change it? This is what they felt good about. This was an example of reasons to keep the children in Clayback Cove.

I was supportive of the community and their efforts and the school board knew this. I'm not the type of person to phone the Board every day, but they knew. I believe that our students were getting a good education, maybe better, because the numbers allowed for more one-on-one instruction.

Peter, in his discussion with the author indicated that things changed after he left.

The parents were completely supportive of the multi-grade teaching that was happening at Clayback Cove, but things changed. He relates:

I think that the teachers who taught there at that time saw themselves as teachers alone, and didn't think of themselves as part of the community. I grew up in the community. I spent more time in that community than I did in my hometown. Those teachers who came in after didn't live in Clayback Cove, but St. Thomas, and drove back and forth to work. There was very little relationship with the people, in the community. Clayback Cove was not ready for that kind of situation, being a closely-knit community. It didn't go over all that well with the community. What they saw of the teachers was their arrival in the morning and their departure in the evening. The impression I get is that the people of Clayback Cove wanted their teachers to be apart of the community.

When the parents went to the school, the principal's office was closed and the students didn't have access to a phone. There were rules put up for the parents in the community, of when they could come to the school, and what they could do in the school. It seems there was a wall built right away and the people weren't used to that. I didn't lock my office door, but I did lock my filing cabinet. When I was there, the people had access to anything in the school, this changed. Immediately they saw the teacher as the outsider

and felt outside the school. I think they tried to teach in Clayback Cove as they would in St. John's or say St. Thomas and that wouldn't work in a small school like Clayback Cove. The people may not have said much publicly, but think it was festering inside and I don't think they would tell you that.

John, who wrote all the correspondence between the board and the community, reflected on this and verbalized that the teachers weren't very supportive of keeping the school in Clayback Cove. He goes on to say:

Maybe it did have an effect, I don't know. If his leaving had some effect, then the board must have had some respect for him, by not closing the school while he was here. The people of this community stood behind that teacher, and he was a good fighter for our community. The teachers that replaced him drove into the community from St. Thomas. Sometimes during the winter months the roads would be blocked and the school would be closed because the teachers couldn't get here and that didn't go over well with the parents. The teachers did complain that they didn't like driving from St. Thomas and they did voice their concerns to the school board that it was an inconvenience for them to get back and forth. Maybe this had some bearing on our school being closed. The teachers didn't want to live here and they didn't want to drive here, maybe that was a factor in our school being closed. They didn't go out of their way to support the community, when our school was being closed.

Mary, who had a daughter in a Challenging Needs class, recalls the teacher saying that it would be better for her daughter because:

...she would be with other students like herself. The teacher that was here then could spend more time with the other students. Up here she was in the classroom with the other students and they couldn't get any work done. Sometimes they put up a divider to separate her from the rest of the class, but a lot of times they still had trouble doing their work.

Mary and her husband were now left with a choice. Their biggest concerns was for the safety of their child. The board said that she would be able to travel on the bus and that the student assistant would travel with her. The student assistant was to also help her with her lunch and any bathroom problems.

Mary, who at the time of the interview, was still unsure of the decision they had made, rationalized it by stating that:

Perhaps it was better here. I don't know. We were told it was better in St. Thomas and I guess you have to believe them, they are supposed to know. I heard from a parent that one of the students from here, when he went to Grade One in St. Thomas, he had the work already done, and he knew the stuff. I don't know, for me it's hard to say what's best. I don't have much learning. With my daughter, she never had no regular schooling, so I don't know what's best. I thought it was best for her in St. Thomas because that is what her teacher told me.

The teachers appear to be supportive of consolidation and appear to be encouraging the parents to bus their children to St. Thomas. There seems to be a wall building between parents and teachers because they are commuting to Clayback Cove, maybe contributing to some negativity, about the quality of education their children are receiving. The parents may be beginning to question in their own minds, whether the education their children are receiving is adequate. Clayton declares this thinking very eloquently as he says:

They just put a lot of old junk, like extra-curricular activities, gym,

music... they fire it at you to get you to close your school. You start to feel guilty, wondering if you are doing what is best for your children. They are the educated ones, they are supposed to know.

Mr. Meadows (the superintendent) relates in his deliberation about Clayback

Cove school that,

programming was the overriding factor in closing the school. However, the parents were concerned about their children fitting in the biggest elementary school in the district. St. Thomas elementary has a population about 500 students.

Mr. Meadows believed that in his understanding,

from research and support staff at the board, the sooner you move younger children into a situation like that the better; the sooner they adjust.

He further states that he couldn't remember the exact research he was using to make this judgement and this research was not given to parents, just general statements. Mr. Meadows felt that programming was an overriding factor with him because he came from a K-11 school system and in his first year of university, he flunked three of his five courses. He contends that his friends at that time came from St. Thomas and were better prepared for university. He indicated that this was a powerful influence on his views on programming. He also felt that single-graded classrooms were more beneficial to education than multi-graded classrooms.

The present board chairman, Rev. Michael Power, who came during the end of

Clayback Cove consolidation process, believed that the reasons for closing Clayback Cove school was the declining enrollment." We felt that they could get a better education in St. Thomas, with teachers engaging in specialized subject areas."

Rev. Power also felt the Clayback Cove students were lacking in the socialization process, students from Clayback Cove were very shy and we felt mingling with others students would be a positive thing. Rev. Power says that it evolved into,

a situation where we could offer a much better program in St. Thomas. The people of Clayback Cove were very concerned and had strong opposition about bussing their small children to St. Thomas during the winter. They had a new school, which they practically built themselves.

Coupled with this sense of guilt among parents, were pressures from the superintendent and school board officials who believed that small schools were inefficient and therefore had to be changed. Parents were beginning to waver in their support for their school.

Rev. Power relates that they put a lot of themselves into their school and didn't want it to close. In the same vein, John relates that closing a school,

cuts into your culture, Quebec is afraid for their culture and ours is being eroded and one way is the abolishing of small schools.

John also notes that the school and the church are the main parts of a community and when you lose one, a part of the community goes with it. John says that,

it means nothing in dollars and cents. A chunk of your community pride

is gone and you can't fill the gap. Something is taken out of your community against your will, probably something that could have stayed.

Those are some of the views and values that were brought to the debate for the next meeting, which was to take place at St. Thomas Elementary, with all board members in attendance. This would be the first time that all board members would hear directly from Clayback Cove residents on why their school should not close. At this meeting a vote would also occur among members to either rescind or accept the official motion passed by the board in March to close Clayback Cove school.

Clayback Cove residents presented a brief at the meeting, outlining the reasons for their school remaining open. The presentation brief in its entirety follows:

To District 122

Submitted by: Concerned Parents and People of Clayback Cove.

Chairman and Board Members:

It does seem rather perpetual that once in a while we are called to stand and defend the longevity of our primary school in Clayback Cove. The fact we are being badgered from time to time has all the earmarking of harassment, infringing upon our heritage, social, human and even constitutional rights. Attending school in Clayback Cove can't be all so bad. It's a tradition that has been carried on for years and those who have passed through the system starting at Clayback Cove are not known to be any worst off than the people around them. We are sure you know how difficult it is to judge what other people will or will not do. Given the best or the worst of educational facilities, some will excel and some will not. Incidentally, there are some facts and figures that the past 15 years of schooling at Clayback Cove have produced. When presented in their

proper perspective, we find them rather impressive and satisfying indeed. In the time given 45 students have passed and are in the process of passing through the system starting in their hometown. When broken down they have the following appearance:

21 students- 47% have already graduated.

Of the 21 students-81% have job training and secondary training.

5 students -11% are currently in Grade 12

13 students -29% are currently in Grade 6-11

6 students -13% dropped out

Taken together, those who have graduated are all gone on to further their education, with those who presently show great promise in the completion of high school. We have an 87% success rate.

Not bad. Should it have been better? We'll never know. Does so called better, more modern and advanced and exposure to it early in the school life of a child make such a difference? According to the figures just presented, we hardly think so. Of course, we don't condemn the advances outrightly, but believe they are just as effective when applied a little later in a child's school years. We believe that such exposure doesn't impact so much upon children in early primary years as their intellectual scope has not yet broadened to the point of accommodating extracurricular materials. The old adage of crawling before walking still has its place. For the educational well being of a child- it seems getting the fundamentals down pat first, is sufficient. Of course, working from the bottom up, it is very important that they do. Coupled with this method of learning researchers in child psychology, sociology and child councillors strongly advocate that a close relationship between parents and a child is crucial to the child's future development. Since every minute together is decisive to that end. A school in your own community allows for strengthening the base upon which a child develops, and can probably suffice extra facilities. After all millions are spent on such research but yet we have a tendency to throw it out and move off in other directions, trying to satisfy other ideologies. So it is our view that placing younger children, unnecessarily, under the rigours of some things that modern society has produced, might well have some drawbacks as well as positive effects. Therefore, we do strongly oppose the closing of our school.

But there are other concerns people have when contemplating sending their children outside their hometown to attend school and that is the adverse winter weather conditions of our area. Ever since the inception of busing students out some 15 years ago we all know and said that it would be just a matter of time when an incident would occur. And it did. Just as recent as March 9, students being bused back to Clayback Cove were delayed some five hours from the time of leaving school until they were returned to St. Thomas and placed in overnight lodgings. Some of whom were slightly injured and in an exhausted condition. Events began to unfold when the bus collided with another machine and was rendered inoperable. Situations like these leave students as sitting ducks for having to overnight on the road. We know quite well that blizzards can intensify to a point when nothing moves. That's the dilemma that parents are faced with and the consequences can be traumatic for children. Certainly we can argue that one incident in 15 years is not such a bad record in itself but predictions like these does not sit well with parents of small children. For those who are already designated to be transported by bus, very strict safety precautions must be taken and at the same time emphasis should be placed on the survival capabilities for the busses. For the remaining students leave them where they are for a while longer.

The list goes on, of reasons why we don't want our school closed at Clayback Cove. All the way from managing children who are subject to sudden illness attacks, to too much depending on substitute teachers in our classes. All this adds negativism to the educational system we are invited to accept. Overcoming those deficiencies means extra cost that might override expenditures as they presently exist. Cost that somebody, somehow has to pay for. Makes me wonder how beneficial closing out the school really is.

The school here at Clayback Cove only places low financial demands on the school board in operating cost. As for paying teachers, it just as well they be paid to work in Clayback Cove as anywhere else in the region. Students commencing in school at home are as destined to go as far in life as anybody. Besides, having a school in our community is part of our Newfoundland heritage and culture which we are already losing too fast.

So lets suspend the folly of having to send children, too young, to different facilities and expose our children to the many, and almost incorrigible inadequacies, thereof.

Superintendent Meadows countered those arguments with cutbacks from government, reduction of teachers and funding for maintenance of existing schools. According to Mr. Meadows, cost was a very limited factor in considering closing Clayback Cove school because its' annual cost was in the range of \$6,000.00 and that was minimal. Yet, parents remembered the board using cost as a factor in their debate. John relates that the board indicated that they would be saving money in closing the school. John says,

When you come to consider it only cost \$6,000.00 to operate the school. They had to put on an extra bus run and purchase busses. The cost to operate those buses and pay operators. I really would like to see all the figures on it. They didn't break down the costs, categorically here and there. They just used their general terms, and really, figures were scanty.

Clayton, another resident of Clayback Cove, recalls that at that meeting the board talked a lot about money. The school board said,

it was costing too much money to keep the school going. They said it was cheaper to close the school and bus the students to St. Thomas. That is what they said anyway. The school board said that they were having financial problems. They told us if the school was kept open, they had to spend money on fuel, lights, upkeep and the rest of the junk, you know what I'm talking about.

The superintendent, in his counter arguments to parents, talked about the benefits of a

music program, a physical education program, access to computers, single-graded classrooms and more social interaction as advantages to attending school in St. Thomas.

Clayton laments that the school board wanted to close the Clayback Cove school "to get more people in St. Thomas and more money for the school--more students the more money."

Mr. Meadows did contend that the reduction of teachers led them to look seriously at moving students to St. Thomas. He argues that the Department of Education could be somewhat responsible for the closing of small schools. He states that "if the government gave us more allocations, we wouldn't have had to close schools. "Roger Meadows argues that at superintendents' meetings, amendments which were made for more teacher allocations for small schools, they were always defeated. He says,

the small rural boards were always overpowered by the larger Boards. The larger, more populace; the more powerful.... that was what the larger urban boards were doing to the small rural boards. The ripple effect from this was, they were closing small schools. The rural boards were closing small schools in their district, because the larger schools had a larger population, and because of that, they had more power and clout with the Government. 'it got passed down the line.'

Mr. Meadows also points out that within board administration, principals of larger schools created problems with respect to teacher allocations. He states that,

we would always tell principals that the department gave allocations to the board. If we didn't come fairly close to, in line, with their allocated units, they would say you didn't give me my fair share, and another school got more than they deserve. This was always the debate over the larger school versus the smaller school. We would always favour the smaller school, and that debate became louder, as the allocations got tighter. Principals may have been advocating that they were treated unfairly and there is power in numbers. Principals of larger schools would say, we can offer more programming, if you close out the school and give us those units. This was always a factor in any allocation debate.

We then may conclude that those are some of the fundamental factors in the consolidation debate at Clayback Cove. Although parents wouldn't be privy to some of this knowledge, it became part of the superintendent's approach to the residents of Clayback Cove.

Furthermore, another factor in the debate to the closing of Clayback Cove school was that some parents began to waver in their support, and began indicating this change to the superintendent. Meadows elaborates that,

When we would have a meeting with the Board or the board executive and the parents in Clayback Cove, there was always a lot of opposition to the closing of the school. Afterwards, after the meeting, in talking with parents, you got some parents saying they want to move, but wouldn't speak up in public because of pressure from the majority. They would, however, like their children to go to St. Thomas. In Clayback Cove a parent of a challenging needs student was caught in this dilemma. You always felt that there were parents wanting their students to move but wouldn't say anything. Sometimes, also, parents would phone or stop you on the street and tell you this. This was a factor thrown in the mix. I would ask, can it be that bad if some parents want their students to move.

Other more vocal parents threatened to change their religion if they closed the school, or at least they wouldn't be attending and supporting the local church. Rev. Power remembers two individuals saying this, and to this day they no longer attend church.

The above are some of the informal and formal incidents at the May meeting concerning the consolidation of Clayback Cove school. The board now had to vote to decide to support the board motion of March to close Clayback Cove school, or to support the parents and allow the school to remain open.

The vote occurred and it was tied. The chairman of the board, who was Clayback Cove's parish priest, voted to break the tie and voted in favour of the residents of Clayback Cove. The school was permitted to remain open for another year. Parents felt relieved and they had stalled the closure.

The victory was short-lived, because during the summer of 1991, District 122 decided, based on teacher allocations for the board, to reassign one teacher from Clayback Cove to St. Thomas. The result was that in September, the Grade six students would be bused to St. Thomas. Junior and senior high school students were already bused to St. Thomas and the Grade six students (three students) would go on that bus. Roger Meadows says that this occurred as the result of pressure from board representatives of St. Thomas and two parents, who wanted their students to move.

He advocates that,

in discussions with the teachers about the delivery of the programs, they mentioned that all the prescribed material may not get covered. The principals in the larger schools would say that some re-teaching was required. Those students needed time for social adjustment, maybe move them now, instead of grade 7, when they came anyway. It came up so often and stayed with me for some reason and I guess it got some validity.

Clayback Cove mounted very little opposition to this manoeuvre because as John and Clayton indicate, for some reason, the community lost some of its support from parents. They felt that government cutbacks were at fault, the closure of the fishery didn't help, and maybe "we just felt defeated." Clayton feels that parents were "sucked" in with the promise of music festivals, sports events and the big library. He indicates that this was promised to his children in high school, but they can't participate in anything "like that, because it is after school hours and when the bus leaves, they must go too."

Clayton further attempts to explain the community's lack of action on the reduction of the teaching unit for 1991-1992,

Well they took the Grade six's and in Grade seven you would have to go anyway. I don't know, I supposed you was tired of it all at the time and the last meeting when we had the vote, they said that you get one more year and that's it. I guess they brought the hammer down. In the beginning everybody was in favour of keeping the school in Clayback Cove but after a while some parents stopped going to meetings because they said it was a waste of time. They said no matter what we do, they are going to close

it anyway. I guess after a while some people began to believe that their children could get a better education in St. Thomas.

On April 23, 1993, a memorandum was sent to parents of Clayback Cove indicating that in June 1993, the school doors would close and school age students of Clayback Cove would no longer attend school in Clayback Cove. Tuesday, June 21, 1993 Clayback Cove school was witness to its' last graduation ceremony. The children received their diplomas and in final ceremonial fashion recited poems, acted out plays and sang songs.

John, Clayton, Mary, and Rev. Michael Power all contend that the future of small schools and communities are in jeopardy.

Clayton says,

losing your school is not like losing money or a truck. It's more than that, after your school closes your community dies and you feel powerless to do anything about it. There is always someone telling you what to do, the government telling you not to fish, the school board telling you what to do with your children. It makes you feel useless, you got no control. Whatever they say, that's what you got to go along with.

The community purchased the school building for \$1.00 and it is now used as a community hall. It's a place to conduct Fishermen Committee meetings, a place for card games and dart leagues.

Now, each morning children as young as four board the bus for St. Thomas and parents eagerly await their return in the evening.

Sheltered Harbour- Case History

Sheltered Harbour is strung out along 4 kilometres of shoreline in several small coves, each small cove housing a few houses and fishing stages. The harbour is sheltered from most of the wind that savage this shore and is in close proximity to the fishing grounds. All of those small coves are connected by road, and a road connects Sheltered Harbour to Darby, St. Thomas and the remainder of Newfoundland.

Sheltered Harbour, like Clayback Cove, had its' roots as a minor French fishing room. The waters were fished by the French in the 1640's. In 1873 the first permanent resident of Sheltered Harbour was the caretaker of the French room (*Encyclopaedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, 1994). In the census of 1901, Sheltered Harbour had a population of 50. Most earned the bulk of their living from the trap fishery and some kept sheep to supplement their incomes.

Sheltered Harbour residents were almost all fisher persons and fish plant workers. Some were employed at the Darby fish plant, which is now closed. Some are currently working with the Department of Highways and others work in St. Thomas, at the hospital or as clerks in some of the retail outlets.

At the time of this study, however, the majority of people in Sheltered Harbour were receiving TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy) as income. Also, many families had left the community to either attend school or seek employment in Western

and Northern Canada.

Sheltered Harbour's settlement history is similar to Clayback Cove in that they were both settled permanently by Newfoundland fishermen in the early 1860's. Its educational history is similar in the early years, however, Sheltered Harbour was not asked to resettle in the 1960's.

Schooling was sporadic in the early years, as was typical of most rural Newfoundland schools. However, after World War II, the community offered programs from Grade I to Grade 11 and the majority of the people earned their Grade 11 in the local community school. Some went on to become teachers, nurses, doctors and lawyers, while others stayed to pursue the fishery and other local jobs. However, most of the community residents have a Grade 11 diploma from that era.

In the late 1960's, when the Newfoundland government decided to amalgamate the denominational schools in St. Thomas, Grade 10 and 11 students were to be bused to St. Thomas high school.

Grace, a teacher and resident at Sheltered Harbour, recalls how this occurred:

The school that was closed in 1991 was built in 1965. It replaced a two-room school that was built about 50 years before. This new school was a three-room school and became the centre of the community. All the community activities took place in the school. The school went from Kindergarten to Grade 6. First it was from Kindergarten to Grade 9. It never housed the high school students, because before it was built the school board had a meeting with parents to ask if they would bus their high

school students to St. Thomas before the school was built. I wasn't involved in that because my children were not attending school at that time. I think it was a mistake because it doesn't matter how young your children are; they are eventually going to school and reach Grade 10 or 11. So, I think when it comes to this sort of thing, all parents in the community should be involved. All the community should be involved, not only those with students in high school. The decision to bus students to St. Thomas back then was only made by parents with children in Grade 10 and 11. This was the beginning of the busing. That was the year they amalgamated all the schools in St. Thomas. They wanted all the students in the outlying areas to attend high school in St. Thomas. They said in a three room school here, you won't get the courses, and the teachers won't be qualified, they will be better taught in St. Thomas. At that time they didn't take into consideration the travel on gravel roads.

There was very little opposition to this move in the 1960's as most parents felt that busing their students would be educationally sound. Grace contends that if there was opposition it was very limited, and if you weren't a parent of high school children, you weren't permitted to attend those meetings. Grace was a parent at the time, but her children were not of school age or were in elementary school.

She elaborates that,

no one else was allowed to go to those meetings in that time, only parents with children attending school. I was a teacher at that time, here, when the busing began. It bothered me, although I didn't have any children in high school at that time. Essentially, somebody was making decisions about the future of my children and I wasn't even allowed to go to any meetings.

This situation remained until the early 1970's, when the board decided to take the Grade 7's and 8's out of Sheltered Harbour and bus them to St. Thomas. Grace

remembers:

We had a good population here at that time and we had 50-60 students at that time from Kindergarten - Grade 9. Then they decided that they were going to take the Grade 7-9. That was in 1972 and 1973. Again in that decision, only parents who had children in those grades were allowed to participate in that decision. There was very little that could have been done at that time. I objected because children would have to get up at 6:30 a.m. and not get back until between 5:00 and 5:30 in the evening. This would affect all the benefits that they said our children would get. I didn't object fully because maybe they would get a better academic background. I was wondering, all the time, because the board was always telling you, that your child is not going to be as well educated as the ones in St. Thomas. I guess that makes you wonder, you want what is best for your children, plus I didn't have the knowledge to argue with them. At that time, we believed what they were saying. They needed their biology, chemistry and physics to get into university to do good science programs. We didn't have teachers here qualified to teach that.

Around the middle 1970's, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland constructed a regional high and elementary school in St. Augustine, a community 50 kilometres away. The parents of Pentecostal students in Sheltered Harbour were encouraged to bus their students to St. Augustine. The majority of the parents complied and Sheltered Harbour school lost more of its student population. However, within a couple of years, most of those same parents were keeping their children in Sheltered Harbour until Grade 3, and then busing them to St. Augustine. Their reasoning, as suggested by Grace, was that Kindergarten students only had a half day school and had to remain in St. Augustine all day.

Grace recalls:

What I understand happened, was they built an all-grade school St. Augustine and their minister said that they needed their students in their own school to get the proper educational instruction. They then took the Kindergarten to Grade 6 and the high school students that were going to St. Thomas at the time. After a while, however, those same parents wouldn't send their children there until Grade 3. When the Kindergarten went, they had to stay all day and someone had to supervise them. Some of them came home who had wet their pants and probably had it on all day. So, the parents said no to Kindergarten, one and two. They then went to school here.

Now, the Sheltered Harbour school was offering educational programs from Kindergarten to Grade 6. This continued on until the fall of 1990, when Sheltered Harbour school was brought on the school board agenda as one of the five schools to be looked at for consolidation and closure. The reasons for closure, as indicated for Clayback Cove, were the same-declining enrollments, government cutbacks, and lack of sufficient educational programming.

On January 18, 1991, a memo was sent to all principals of the five schools slated for closure. Sheltered Harbour school was one of those schools. The text of the memo reads:

TO: Parents of Sheltered Harbour

From: Roger Meadows, Superintendent of Education

Re: Future Status of Sheltered Harbour School

Date: January 18, 1991.

In the next few weeks I shall be arranging meetings with you to discuss the status of schools in these communities for the 1991-1992 school year. Some factors necessitating this are possible government cutbacks, cutbacks in funding and teachers, declining enrollments, improvements of roads, nearness of schools to others, etc.

Roger Meadows

Superintendent of Education

Prior to this memo Grace contends rumours were abounding at this time:

The very first thing we heard was another school closed in a community similar to us. All the small schools in the area were closing. People saying and rumours floating around that this school was going to be next.

Dr. Kevin Gerard, an assistant superintendent involved in the Sheltered Harbour Closure, was asked if rumours played any role in the consolidation of schools. He answered,

yes, sure they do. They would be planted to test the waters. That's a part of human nature. If you don't think that's happening, you should delete yourself from the human race. That is a given.

Clara, a resident of Sheltered Harbour, remembers that,

for years there was a lot of rumours and I think the first I heard was when our teachers got their layoffs. But I guess there must have been letters and

we had meetings with the board regarding our school closing.

The meeting that Clara is referring to, occurred on March 4, 1991. On March 1, 1991, a memo was tabled by the superintendent to go to parents of Sheltered Harbour to discuss the future of their school. The meeting was to occur on March 4, 1991, at the school in Sheltered Harbour.

However, according to a handwritten note on the memo it did not get sent to the parents. The parents found out about the meeting on the morning of March 4, 1991. They then found themselves scrambling to organize in advance of that meeting.

The meeting of March 4, 1991, was an eventful night for the parents and the superintendent (Mr. Meadows). The superintendent began the meeting, as in Clayback Cove, with reasons of declining enrollment, insufficient programming, and multi-graded classrooms as deficient. The board's intention was to close Sheltered Harbour school, bus the Kindergarten and Grade 6 students to Darby, 12 km away. In addition, the Grade 7 students of Sheltered Harbour, who were slated to attend school in St. Thomas that coming September, would now go to Darby instead of St. Thomas. Sheltered Harbour students who were in Grade 8 through twelve would still go to St. Thomas; Kindergarten to Grade 7 would go to Darby. Sheltered Harbour students would continue in Darby, now, until Grade 9, when all students in Level I, II, and III from

Darby and Sheltered Harbour would go to St. Thomas.

Darby is situated some 12 km to the southwest from Sheltered Harbour. It is similar to Sheltered Harbour, however, there are some small businesses located there. A nightclub, a small grocery store, a small fish plant and a couple of small take-out restaurants exist there. Its population is almost double that of Sheltered Harbour and its school population would be the same. Darby has a medium size school, with a gym, a library and a lab. Initially, when the Darby school was constructed, it housed Kindergarten to Grade 11 students. This arrangement continued until the late 70's when Darby's high school students were bused to St. Thomas.

This was to be a discussion meeting and residents remember the presentation given by superintendent Roger Meadows as one that concentrated on programming, declining enrollment, board funding and teacher allocations. The parents raised concerns about busing T.M.H. students, storm conditions, the cost of keeping the school versus the cost of busing and an overall concern that the board was only concerned about money.

James, a resident fisherman, remembers Mr. Meadows discussing, at length, the programming issue. He recalls that he seemed to be preoccupied with this issue. He recalls:

They talked about better programming. That was bullshit. All they had in

Darby was two computers. We had one here for 26 students, they had two for 90 students. We had a great library and a recreation centre, next to the school, for our gym. We had a French program here. I don't know why? They just bussed them out. They wanted to up the enrollment in Darby, to keep more teachers there. When we went we took 26 students. This was political, I can hear someone saying, "this will be a feather in my cap, if I close those schools. This might make me look good with the Department. "They were out to close those schools, no matter what!

Elaine, a parent of two children now attending Darby Intermediate school, remembers Mr. Meadows talking about the enrollment at Sheltered Harbour school. She recalls that:

there was a drop in enrollment and there was a reduction in teachers. They said it was too expensive to keep it open. They didn't give us any numbers. The reason, the school was slated for closure, the Board said was because of declining enrollments and the programs being offered to students were suffering.

James, again, recalls that,

the enrollment was the main reason for closing the school, but they also talked about cost. If they had to keep the school open, they had to repair it. We said the bussing would cost as much as the repairs. That didn't stand up according to them. They wanted to send them to a bigger school with more teachers and more programs. They said they could avoid multi-grades. Here we had K-3 in one class, now they have K-2 in one class and 3 & 4 in one class, not much difference if you ask me. They also have more students in those classes now than they did here with three grades in one class. I don't think that's better. I think it is better for more grades in the one room. My daughter is now in a Grade 4 and 5 class. When she gets to Grade 5, she will know a lot about it. I think it benefits the students to have more than one grade in a classroom, at least for the

better students. The only way two grades would be bad for students is if there is too many students in that grade. 40 students would be too many. My son has two grades in the one room with 12 students, I don't think that's hurting his education.

At this meeting of March 4, 1991, the board also presented anticipated costs as a reason for proposing to close the Sheltered Harbour school. Those anticipated costs would amount to \$24,000.00 for possible roof repairs, a new furnace and a new sewer system.

Grace remembers that the community couldn't foresee this case at all. She relates that,

we were taken totally by surprise because they spent \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year or two before they decided to close the school. In 1988-89, we had new carpet installed, new board on the walls, new drapes, exit lights, new toilets and a small science lab and library. We had everything. During the time they were closing other schools, they were renovating ours.

Mr. Meadows indicated that those repairs were done in 1988-1989 and when asked why those extensive repairs were carried out, he responded by saying,

it was on the books with the capital expenditure. I.E.C. had it stated, and we felt it was necessary to keep the building in good condition while the students were there. The size of the building may have played a role in the closing. I don't think the conditions of any of the buildings was a factor in closing any of the schools. Programming was the key.

This cost factor was a non-factor, according to James, because, they said there was a lot of repairs to be done. That was lies. Only a couple of years

before, we did major repairs on the school. They said we needed a new furnace and a new roof. The furnace is still being used today and we offered to put shingles on it ourselves. They still said no. They decided what they were going to do, and that was it. They decided what they were going to do, even before they came here and had the meeting. They had the meeting just to clear themselves. I stood up and told them "You're calling us together, to save your own asses, to make it legal and to look like we had some say. You are taking us for a ride."

The meeting ended about three hours after it started and in the notes recorded by the board, a sentence at the end reads that from this meeting the board recognized that, some parents were against closing the school; some remained silent on the issue and some wanted them bused to Darby.

Prior to the next meeting, which was to be scheduled within a couple of weeks, people were calling the board office for information about their impending school closure. They wanted to know if the board had made official its decision. According to Grace:

the board would always say we will let you know. We had no access to board members, only the superintendent, and he was fighting for his own job at the time.

On March 12, 1991, Mr. Meadows drafted a Memo to teachers and parents of the five schools slated for closure. The memo stated that "at the board meeting, Thursday, March 14, 1991, I shall be recommending to the school board that schools in above named communities close on June 21, 1991."

Grace, James, Clara and other residents of Sheltered Harbour all said that they were unaware of this meeting being held and the result was that Sheltered Harbour had no representation at this meeting, which occurred in St. Thomas. It was at this meeting that Clayback Cove was able to keep their school open for an extra year.

Grace contends that she officially heard about closure when she received her letter of reassignment. She states:

I got a letter and I still carry it around with me. I was 25 years teaching in this school. I got a letter saying, 'your school will close in June this year, if you are applying to Darby, we will accept you, If you do not accept this position you are hereby laid off.' That's how I got the news, no more than you would say to a worker you had hired for a week's work. The community learned through us telling them about the letters. No meeting with the community, the meeting came afterwards.

When asked by the author, what the community reaction was to this knowledge.

Grace exudes,

devastated! devastated! They called the board. Do you know how I knew about it before I got my letter. One of the coordinators called me and said to look for a letter coming today. He told me that there was a meeting last night and they decided to close your school. He asked if the people of Sheltered Harbour knew about the board meeting and why they weren't there. I told him that they had kept telling us from the Board that we would know and have some input into the decision. We never even knew that our school was being considered to be closed. The people of Clayback Cove were there. They were informed and we didn't know. Someone from the Board phoned someone in Clayback Cove about the meeting, but no one called anybody here. The Board member in Clayback Cove wasn't told officially either, he had a friend attend the

meeting.

From the author's discussions with the community of Clayback Cove, this miscommunication never surfaced. However, it was argued adamantly from the viewpoint of the residents of Sheltered Harbour. This author was unable to ascertain if this memo was delivered to the parents or not. The local newspaper reported, on March 20, 1991, after the official notification of March 14, 1991, that several individuals were prepared to fight to retain their school. The local paper pointed out that Sheltered Harbour residents had asked the board to come to Sheltered Harbour to discuss the school's future.

Sheltered Harbour's absence at this meeting was equated with disinterest by the board and superintendent Meadows. However, Sheltered Harbour residents felt that they had no inkling of their right to express their views at this meeting. They indicated it was never told to them that they could make a presentation on their behalf.

Now, fully aware that they could present a brief to pressure the board to rescind its decision, they took action, called a meeting amongst themselves and a decision was reached to draft a letter requesting that they be allowed to present their brief. The letter reads:

To: Chairman and Board members of District 122

From: Parents of Sheltered Harbour
Re: Future status of Sheltered Harbour Elementary
Date: March 15, 1991

It has come to our attention that we have been discriminated against. At the time that the school board decision was made concerning school closures we were not aware that we could present our case to board members. We were under the impression that our case was made at a public meeting held here at the school two weeks ago. At that meeting, it was loudly voiced that our wish was for the school to remain open. Upon hearing about the meeting held last night, however, a second public meeting was called, at which it was unanimously decided that we would **demand** the same opportunity to present our case, as was granted the two communities last night. Therefore, we request that the school board meet with the parents of Sheltered Harbour on Wednesday, March 20, at 7:30 p.m. at Sheltered Harbour Elementary. An immediate response is requested.

Yours sincerely,

Parents of Sheltered Harbour.

According to residents of Sheltered Harbour, no written correspondence was received from the board, and no board documentation could be found to indicate that this was done.

However, after discussions with their parish priest and the superintendent, the community learned that a board meeting was scheduled to take place in the opposite end of the district within a month to a couple of weeks. They were determined to have

a delegation there.

The superintendent was informed by Grace, who was appointed chairperson of their newly formed committee, that a delegation would be at the next meeting to present a brief on the communities behalf.

When the parents arrived, after travelling three hours over a very rough road under construction, they were informed that they wouldn't be allowed to present because they weren't on the agenda for that meeting. Grace recalls,

that was where we had to travel for three hours over a road under construction. There were a lot of parents that went from here. They wouldn't let us speak. They never had time, we weren't on the agenda and they had another meeting scheduled afterwards. This meeting was scheduled in the opposite end of the district, and all the schools were being closed in the area, three of them were. Eventually they said they would listen to parents. Again they said that I wasn't allowed to speak because I wasn't a parent. I did eventually get permission to speak. I got five to ten minutes and then they cut me off. The chairman told me he needed to hear from parents. They allowed a mentally handicapped woman to speak. She had the right to speak, of course, I would never deny that. She had very little understanding of the situation and that was the voice of the parents they accepted. She did try her best, I admire her for that.

Previous to this meeting and after this meeting, Grace, a teacher and now the chairperson of the committee to save Sheltered Harbour school was told by one of the superintendents, Mr. Roger Meadows or Dr. Kevin Gerard, that she would be in conflict with the board's decision to close Sheltered Harbour School and therefore, was

encouraged not to speak at meetings. Grace recalls that,

... I wasn't allowed to go, because I was in their employ, and they said it would be unethical for me to be there. I wasn't a parent now. My children were going to school in St. Thomas, so I couldn't attend on this basis. I was a part of the community, but the superintendent, at that time, told me I wasn't allowed to go. Because he wanted only to talk to parents.

When Dr. Gerard was asked pointedly about this situation concerning Grace and the alleged "conflict of interest" scenario, he replied saying,

well, they certainly wouldn't be encouraged by us. I wouldn't encourage teachers to get involved. However, I am aware of many cases where teachers have gotten involved in opposition to a school being closed. Indeed it would have happened. I have been to meetings where teachers have spoken out against what the Board had proposed. The board acknowledged the fact that it was happening, did not take any actions, because there were no negative repercussions to the teachers. We respected the freedom of the teacher. The board decisions would have to stand the test of people speaking against it. If it couldn't stand that test, then it was dismissed.

At this meeting, Sheltered Harbour parents then asked the board to reconsider their motion of March 14, 1991 to close the school, but the chairman said that no vote would be conducted on that issue at this meeting. Clara remembers:

We were supposed to be on the agenda and when we got there they would not let us speak. However, we did get about five minutes. The rest of the meetings was between us, the business manager and the superintendent. The night we meet with the full board, the three hour meeting, they wouldn't decide on our school. They refused to take a vote. The chairman wouldn't put it to a vote. I think if they voted that night we

would have been able to keep our school. We got a little opportunity to correct the wrong information that the board had been given. We got our little chance to tell our side, the board opinions seem to change. I believe that most of the board didn't have the correct information about our school.

Shortly after this meeting where no vote was conducted, the board mentioned, unofficially to the people of Sheltered Harbour, that maybe a meeting by teleconference would be feasible to discuss the notice of motion to reconsider/vote on closing Sheltered Harbour school. That meeting never took place because the board dissolved over the controversial decision of the location of a new board office.

However, on May 3, 1991, a memo was sent to the parents of Sheltered Harbour indicating the permanent nature of the closure of their school. The body of the text reads:

TO: Parents of Sheltered Harbour
FROM: Roger Meadows, Superintendent of Education
RE: Future status of Sheltered Harbour School

Please be advised that District 122 School Board will be closing its school at Sheltered Harbour effective the end of the current school year. Busing arrangements will be made for all students to attend Darby Intermediate School, Darby, beginning September 3, 1991.

Mr. Roger Meadows

Superintendent of Education

Up to this time the board had not voted or even meet to discuss, the notice of motion, accepted at the last board meeting, to rescind or uphold the official declaration of March 14, 1991 to close the school in Sheltered Harbour. The IEC was now acting in place of the board, but only in "a caretaker role."

The residents of Sheltered Harbour, over the summer of 1991, had very little access to a source of information regarding the future status of their school. However, on July 8, 1991, with a new superintendent now in place, Dr. Kevin Gerard, the people of Sheltered Harbour sent a petition to the board chairman indicating that unless the meeting was called to vote on the future school status, they would not be sending their students to Darby in September, 1991. The petition reads:

Chairman
District 122 School Board
St. Thomas

Dear Sir:

It is now the eight of July and we have not yet heard from the School Board if a meeting has been called to discuss whether or not to close Sheltered Harbour school. Therefore, we have decided as parents at a meeting in Sheltered Harbour tonight, that we are going to take action ourselves. This letter is to inform you that we are still holding our members to the promise of support. We understand that the Board has been reinstated and want to know why a meeting has not been called. We want a meeting of all the members held around the middle of August. Otherwise, no students from Sheltered Harbour will be boarding a bus to

Darby on September third. Further action will be taken if need be.

Sincerely Yours

Parents of Sheltered Harbour

This letter of petition was signed by 35 parents and concerned citizens of Sheltered Harbour.

No further correspondence was received from the board and on September 3, 1991 (school opening), parents from Sheltered Harbour didn't send their children to school in Darby. A new school bus was added to the board's fleet of busses costing approximately \$32,000 a year to operate. This bus came each day of that week to pick up students, but only the Grade 7's boarded the bus to Darby.

Clara recalls:

The parents were still unhappy about their children being bused to St. Thomas from the early 1970's. That went ahead anyway and I guess if they said the school was going to close it was going to close. It is the same with everything. The feeling we got from the superintendent was, that once he said the school was going to close, it was going to close. What they are going to do, they are going to do. We fought the issue because we thought we might change their minds. We did have a demonstration with placards, and the like. We kept our children out of school for a week but the Grade 7's went to school in Darby that week because they would have to go to St. Thomas. We felt it was alright for the grade 7's to go to Darby, but not the K-6 students. We gave in after a week, I guess, we knew we couldn't win. We decided to send them because they weren't going to change their minds. If we kept our children out too long, they would be missing out on their education.

This demonstration didn't have the cementing effect that the organizers wanted it to have. The community became further divided. Clara indicated that the parents were very vocal, but certain factions of the community were very silent and some parents began bringing their students to school a couple of days into the protest. Clara remembers it as:

The parents were very active but other community members were silent. I think they were supportive but very silent. Then we had the other religious group in the community who were not supportive. If they would have brought their children back to our school, the main reason for closing would have been gone. The reasons we objected was because the small children were being bussed during the winter. We were concerned for their safety. Our school here was good. They didn't seem to be lacking anything. Maybe with one teacher per grade, they may have a better chance of success, but our students were doing well in a multi-graded system. The very thought of loosing the school made me feel very sad. When you walked down the road, you could hear the children learning, now it is dead. I miss not having children here anymore, you don't see a child, until after supper.

James recalls that,

We kept them out as a last ditch effort to save our school, but a parent brought her students anyway. That broke the group. I figure if they done that, they wanted the school to close, anyway.

That coming week, a meeting was demanded by the parents of Sheltered Harbour between the superintendent and an official from the IEC. However, the meeting didn't occur until September 16, 1991, and students from Sheltered Harbour were now attending school in Darby.

At the September 16, 1991, meeting, 11 parents attended the meeting. From the minutes, it suggests The IEC official and the board office staff came to hear the concerns of the “parents before putting a process in place for a new board to reconsider the former school board's decision to close Sheltered Harbour School.” The IEC official advised that the new board would not be in place until late October or early November and that it would be likely after Christmas, before the closure would be finally settled.

Sheltered Harbour parents in attendance demanded that the IEC deal with the issue now. The response was that it would be deemed illegal to change any decisions made by the former board, without a new board in place.

Some parents questioned the correctness of the impending cost of \$24,000.00 for maintenance to Sheltered Harbour school. It was noted that the business manager would be asked to explain those figures to the parents. This meeting ended with the assurance that the IEC official and Dr. Kevin Gerard, would brief the board fully and parents concerns would be heard fully before a vote was taken.

A new board was in place by November of that year (1991) and parents were given the opportunity to present their grievances. The meeting was held in St. Thomas and only Grace and another teacher appeared before the board to present the brief. Part of the presentation, dated March 15, 1991, reveals what they wanted to say at the board

meeting where Grace was not allowed to speak and the remainder deals with the events after that meeting. It never got presented until November 1991, eight months later. It reads as follows:

Sheltered Harbour Presentation made to Board 122

In March, 1991, the school board called a meeting of the parents of Sheltered Harbour regarding the future status of Sheltered Harbour Elementary. At that meeting, we openly expressed our opinions and feelings, and asked questions based on the information presented. We thought we had made it clear to the superintendent and the chairman of the school board that we wanted the school to remain open. This was further confirmed by Mr. ———, remarking that there was no need to even call a vote, as our position was quite clear.

So, it was with shock and dismay that we learned that the school Board had voted to close our school. At the same time, we learned that two schools slated for closure were to remain open due to presentations made at this school board meeting. Those presentations had made the difference, and our absence had been taken as disinterest. In actual fact, we were not at that meeting to present because we were unaware we could do so. We were under the impression that the public meetings carried out by the school board in each community concerned were the only opportunity to make our views known and we felt we had done this very effectively.

Moreover, we found out that other communities had been called and told that they could make presentations if they so desired. Also Mr. Meadows and Rev. Power assured us that all avenues would be explored (things like cost of moving students, numbers, where they would go, how they would be accommodated, changes, etc, before a final decision was made. Apparently, none of this was done. As far as we can find out, not only were these avenues not explored, but we got very little support from the member who attended the Sheltered Harbour meeting. Only Mr. Meadows tried to state our case, but for some reason he didn't get very far. The vote was done on the spot without apparently any consideration of the consequences. We were lost in the school board decision

issue.

Well, immediately upon finding out about the apparent discrimination, a meeting was called and a letter was drafted and sent to every member of the school board, plus the superintendent demanding some opportunity to present our case as others were given. We also requested that the Board would come to Sheltered Harbour and meet with the people.

Well, we did get a chance, but it was far from Sheltered Harbour where we had to do it. We had to drive to _____ four hours to present our brief. Upon arrival, to our horror, Mr. (chairman) informed us we had 10 minutes of the board's time. We weren't even on the agenda! It was only due to the generosity of another presenter that we got the time to present our brief.

Then he wasn't going to allow any follow-up from parents present until a Board member insisted, and only then we get five minutes, and no discussion! He (chairman) disallowed a vote on the school closure, hanging us up on a technicality. This was done, although all members present were willing to vote, and as a matter of fact 7 members promised their support! and that is where we still stand—with a motion to rescind the school closure—despite assurances from Mr. Gerard and Mr. Casey (business manager) that the issue would be voted on in two weeks!

Something happened within two weeks alright—the school board resigned—we were lost in a bigger issue again! But we did not give up. Instead we focused our attention on the IEC, who were serving as an interim school board. Numerous calls, correspondence, and a petition to the chairman of the IEC resulted in him visiting Sheltered Harbour on September 16. Though he had the legal power and authority to reopen our school, he refused to do so, choosing instead to wait for a new school board, which he said would be in place by November.

You see before you a frustrated group of people who have waited over a year—a year filled with false hopes and promises—for a decision regarding our school. A decision which was made on two other schools in one night. We feel that the Board was convinced that time would take care of it, but they were mistaken, as our presence here today proves.

First of all, we would like to look at some of the reasons why small schools are being looked at, at this time, and as we do that we will be presenting our arguments against each reason, both through these written statements and verbal remarks from people who have made this trip.

1. Government Funding:

Government funding is frozen again. Are our school boards so desperately in need of funds that they need to close 3-5 schools at once? In all of Newfoundland last year only 10 schools were closed. Yet, this year **our board** has been considering **five**. Have we managed our money so badly that this freeze will cause these schools to close to make up for the shortfall? Would money really be saved? **We believe not!**

The Deputy Minister of Education was quoted as saying, "If there are small schools open where there are nearby larger schools, give me reasons why they are still open." This was the opening remark made by Mr. Meadows at Sheltered Harbour.

In talking to government officials, I've been told that the deputy minister's words were taken out of context. When he said a unified system would help keep common schools, he didn't mean "go out and close every small school in the province." But this board seems to have taken what he said literally!

Then again we could look at it another way and see government looking at resettlement all over again. Bigger is better (mega, mega). We all know the devastating effects of the 1960's move in that direction.

2. Operating costs:

Basically, schools are being closed to save money. However, would such a saving really take place? Sheltered Harbour elementary is operating at a cost of \$11,401.07 a year (if that's not exactness). The amount of \$24,000.00 is projected to be spent to maintain the school in the future.

What has not been clearly pointed out however, is the time span during which this money will be spent. This could potentially be the amount needed over 10 years or more. In addition, the actual amount itself is in question. For example, roofing costs are estimated at \$4000.00. However, shingles would actually only cost (based on quality #1, everything included) from \$1800 - \$2000 or (based on quality #2) from \$1400 to \$1600. Installation could be done by government programs or free labour. Any person in Sheltered Harbour would be only too glad to help shingle the roof.

New Furnace: We're sure that by the time a new furnace is needed it would be a justifiable expense because the cost of maintenance of the furnace to date has been minimal. It has been in the school for a number of years.

New Sewer: Over the last two years the sewer has frozen up. Each year, equipment dug up the line and thawed it out. Surely the cost of bringing equipment back and forth digging up pipes could have been part of the actual installation of a new system.

The school board seems very concerned with this \$24,000.00 figure to be spent in the future. We are amazed that the thousands of dollars of government money invested in the school only four years ago to renovate it has not been considered (fire doors, corridors, science room, library, carpeting, windows, siding, insulation, lighting). Are we willing to write of such an investment?

3. Teacher Allocation: Teacher allocation for this board will supposedly be reduced by 5. However, in Sheltered Harbour there are three tenured teachers who if the school closed would have to be placed within the board. Therefore, the overall numbers of teachers would not be reduced by closing the Sheltered Harbour school.

4. Declining Enrollment:

At the time our school was closed, our enrollment was above three of the schools considered on par with our school. Actually, our enrollment was more than Clayback Cove, which was reopened. Over the next five years, our enrollment is projected to increase, overall.

However, no one can predict such figures with certainty-not even schools in larger centres. After all, people leave communities in hard economic times, but so too they return when life is no better in other locations.

5. Transportation:

Transportation has improved - our road is now paved. But paved roads aren't necessarily safer roads. After all, we live in Newfoundland, where weather is the problem, not roads. A paved road still gets blocked with snow, and slippery with ice. We know from experience that there are days you cannot see around Darby, when we were in school at Sheltered Harbour (yesterday was a good example, stormy there; clear here). The geographical placement of those two communities is such that weather affects them differently. Statistics will bear out that Sheltered Harbour has less school days, than any other school in the area.

Within the transportation issue is busing. Closing Sheltered Harbour school involves busing students to Darby. Maintaining this bus costs \$24,000.00 a year. This figure compares with the total projected expenditure on our school for the next X number of years! Right now there's no charge for the lunch hour bus run. We know charges are in place elsewhere, and are coming. Are they waiting for our school to close permanently before letting parents know of this additional cost?

Aside from busing costs, there's the well-being cost to these students and their families. Imagine putting a four-year-old on a bus at 8:00 A.M. alone to go outside the community away from parents and familiar things to go to school. This child will spend at least 13 years on a bus! No wonder Newfoundland has the highest drop-out rate in the country. Imagine the physical toll this takes on those kids who get motion sickness! They could well be half-way into morning classes before they feel, well enough to attend, let alone learn. What about children who become sick during the day, but whose parents cannot come the 12 km to get them? In Sheltered Harbour, those without transportation could walk or get a ride from the neighbour.

What about the educational cost of busing? So far this year, the Sheltered Harbour students who attend Darby have lost three days of

school because the bus wouldn't run, yet Darby school remained open and classes went on.

Social Growth:

Larger schools can provide better social growth. There are, however, many instances to indicate where larger is not better. Phrases such as: "only a number comes readily to mind. We had a family atmosphere in our school. Everyone knew everybody very well. Discipline problems were minimal, and children were comfortable among friends. In a large school they would be among strangers. We know that children are adaptable but what evidence do we have that children are not affected by such changes, especially very young children."

The individual attention given to our children would be lost in a larger class, the rapport with the teacher, the closeness: how many times have I heard "Mom" instead of "Miss." That's closeness!! I wonder how often is a teacher of 25-30 called "Mom." Once in a while, but not as often.

Another reason, "Students from small schools moved to larger schools can receive as many programs or more programs in some cases than they could in the small school."

This comment is debatable. In our experience, students in multi-grade classrooms receive programming as good or better than in larger schools with one grade and large numbers. This is because of the "spill-over effect." That is, students from one grade are getting programming from the other grades, which is reinforced over the years in that classroom. With the new thematic approach to learning, and the new emphasis on peer tutoring, the multi-grade classroom becomes the ideal.

We have a special needs student in our school, who had to be considered in any location. To begin with, the cost of transporting him by special taxi over the longer distance to Darby has increased, and that took six weeks of his absence in the afternoons to straighten out!

More important than his transportation needs are his educational needs

and development. This child has made great progress in his two years at Sheltered Harbour school. His speech, motor development, and cognition have improved. Being in familiar surroundings, and being integrated into the classroom played a large role in his development. Since this child has been relocated, such familiarity and integration has decreased. The larger class does not allow for the amount of integration he had in the past, nor the familiarity and security he had in Sheltered Harbour. As well, the greater travel distance has required him to get up a half hour earlier in the mornings. This has been a big problem for this student who had difficulty being alert with that extra half hour of sleep.

Are you aware of how detrimental such a move has been for this child? Let's, for argument's sake, compare the two schools' resources, facilities and numbers.

In both schools the music and French programs are the same, both schools have a catalogued library-containing resource books, encyclopaedias and both schools have a TV, VCR, and an overhead projector. This is where the similarity ends. Although both schools have comparable phys. ed facilities, in Sheltered Harbour we had much greater access to facilities.

Although both schools have computers, the children had greater access in Sheltered Harbour-obviously due to lower enrollments (one for 25 students versus two for 90).

In Sheltered Harbour, we had listening and learning centres throughout the classroom. However, the classroom in Darby is just too crowded for such centres. Because of our presence in Darby both the library and the multi-purpose room are being used as classrooms. This is to the detriment of all students, decreasing everybody's access to those rooms.

The bottom line is our presence in Darby is not improving programming overall, but we realize there are some benefits.

We were told in the letter by Mr. Meadows that he was recommending to the school board that the schools be closed because they believe it was educationally sound, but it was economics that closed our school. We

don't believe it was economically sound, let alone educationally sound.

All the questions need to be answered before educationally sound would be accepted as a true statement in this school scenario.

Probably we should add some statistics and research findings to back up what we're trying to say. In 1984 the Reach for the Top national champions came from a high school in Manitoba of less than 50 students. In a science aptitude test in 1990 Sheltered Harbour Elementary were top in the province. We must have done something right. We have only to turn on the TV to see the instances of school vandalism - a perception of increasing discipline problems and decline in school standards in many urban locations.

There's an ever growing concern also that the very fabric of our existence is being erupted. Our cultural standards, small towns, and the feel of being part of small town living is being lost in the quest for BIGGER- everything. Is this resettlement of our children part of another government Resettlement? Governments seem to be gearing everything to bigger centres. Perhaps the school boards are helping them!

One research finding states that "not only was the multi-graded situation not harmful to students, but in fact it was a superior classroom setting for affective development. "Quality my friends, is not measured by the number of courses offered. Simply because a school can't be all the things to all students doesn't mean it cannot do some things well.

In one place in the States one serendipitous discovery was the realization that large schools were increasingly embracing traditional small one room educational practices such as individualized instruction, cross age grouping, and peer tutoring-things we have been doing all along!

Over the years I have come to realize that learning takes place best in pleasant, familiar surroundings, with good facilities and resources and committed caring teachers, most of all with happy contented children. Where can this best be attained? Well, we believe for the children of Sheltered Harbour, this can be best attained in their own school.

After a year of torture, where we have been living in limbo, we have come to this meeting today. We realize no resolution will be forthcoming today and we are thankful that it will be analysed fully by you honourable people.

It is time my friends to listen to the people of Sheltered Harbour, show them and your teachers some respect, and look closely at all the options and make a fair, just and final decision. Please. We are all tired, but hopefully not defeated yet.

Thank you.

Immediately after this presentation, the board retired to a room and voted on the notice of motion to close or keep open Sheltered Harbour School. The vote decided to uphold the original decision of March 14, 1991 to close Sheltered Harbour School.

Grace felt as if someone had died in her immediate family. She relived that moment:

I went through a state of depression and I wasn't fit to live with. However, when I got to the classroom and closed the door, I was still in Sheltered Harbour. One little child cuddled me all that year, she was so devastated. Even now, she is in Grade three or four she still wants to go home.

Today, the parents say we don't hear a sound. The children are all gone. No school, no community. I have no problems teaching in Darby. But I don't care where those children are taught, they are not getting anything any better, than they could have gotten in Sheltered Harbour. Students who come out of small schools are going to be better leaders. There is nothing personal about a big school. The students don't know the teachers. They put counsellors in those schools. You don't need

counsellors in small schools. Children don't need counsellors in small schools, the teachers are their friends and counsellors.

Outside of a family member dying, it was the most devastating thing I have ever went through.

When asked why only two teachers showed up for that presentation in St. Thomas, almost a year after the decision to close the school James states,

I don't know, now. The school was going to close and some parents were sending their kids. I guess that 'hove' everybody off track. It was finished anyway. Maybe we could have encouraged the other religious parents to keep their children home. We didn't have time to set our community in order. We spent most of our time fighting to keep our school open and not encouraging other people to bring their children back. Our community was split on religious grounds and then to some degree we choose the wrong chairperson and the board knew that and used it against us. That could be why we lost our protest. The board is like the government. They decide six months before they announce it. In the six months you talk about it, it's done while your are talking. I don't rightly know of any sound advice I can give.

Grace, in her last deliberation on the consolidation process on Sheltered Harbour, offered some condolences on the future of education in Newfoundland and some advice to other communities who may experience what Sheltered Harbour had in 1991. She relayed that,

I think we are going backward and the government and their policies are at fault. The parents were told what is good for their children. The cost to the board was the paramount factor. They wanted to close the school because we were in debt, overall, and the man who was the hardnose was

going to be the big government hero. The government, of course, told us we are not closing your school, the board is. It was all a game of politics. The Minister of Education said, it was not his decision. It was a board decision.

What's going to happen? The centralization process is saying we only want one big place where all the services is centralized. They are saying we must change. The reasons they gave for closing out our school are not valid. Here we had a community centre, where we did our gym activities. In the winter, we had to put on our snowsuit and walk to the hall. The children didn't mind this, as a matter of fact, they loved it. We had computers, French and music. I spent hours after school doing music and plays, now they don't get any of that because they are bused.

Maybe they want to close rural Newfoundland. If we don't have multi-graded classes in the future, we will have no schools. They seem to be aiming at administrative efficiency and not what is best for the child. We still have buses going all over the place. They didn't save any money. They just took the heart out of the community when they closed the school. Where there is no children, there is no community. Our school went, people are moving, now the church and then the community. People are saying if they can be bused here, they can be bused elsewhere where the parents may be able to find better incomes.

I think some of those children will bear the scars forever, and I feel a great many of them may not lead full, productive lives and may need counselling in the future.

Clara, today, now recalls the effect it has had on her and the community:

I feel sad, because when you take the children out of the community. What do you have left? It would be a community as such, but no children, no noise in the morning, while I was out pinning out clothes. I still miss that. Now it's dead. No children's voices at all. I was sad we lost our school.

That coming winter, 1992, the United Church Women's Association bought the

building for a \$1.00. The building would still house the small library and would now be used as a meeting place, for card games, dart leagues and the like. However, in 1993, the United Church Women's Association sold the building to a local resident. He now rents it to TAGS and other federal agencies, who instruct the fishermen and fish plant workers in Emergency CPR, life skills, and other courses developed to encourage the fishermen to professionalize themselves in advance of the returning fishery - if and when the fishery opens again.

Chapter V Summary and Conclusion

Clayback Cove

In the 1960's the community of Clayback Cove was slated to be resettled but the community refused, unlike other similar communities in the area. From the educational perspective, the result was students from Clayback Cove, who wanted to complete Grades 10 and 11, were offered \$50.00 a month to attend school in St. Thomas. Those who went, and they were few, had to stay in St. Thomas all week and their means of transportation to and from Clayback Cove was travelling by boat or walking the 8 km distance to St. Thomas.

Somewhere between the 1960's and 1973, when a gravel road was completed to Clayback Cove, the Grade 8's and Grade 9's were all slated to attend school in St. Thomas. The great majority, when forced to leave home, quit school or waited in the St. Thomas school until they were of legal age to quit. Many of those students experienced little or no success in their schooling years. The result is that most of the adults in Clayback Cove today have little or no high school education.

In the early 1970's, parents all across Newfoundland were encouraged to send their children to recently built centralized elementary and high schools because those schools promised more and varied programs, gymnasium facilities, music programs, library facilities and the like; essentially a lethal dose of education far better

than they would or could ever secure in their own small schools or communities. Most small communities in rural Newfoundland offered little or no resistance to those policy decisions by government.

Clayback Cove was no exception, except very few students went to their designated school in St. Thomas, and if they went, very few stayed and graduated, basically because students had to board in other people's houses during the week, and travel by boat, or walk between Clayback Cove to visit home on the weekends. However, after 1973 when a road was completed more students began to get a high school education. Some graduated from Grade 11 and went on to college and hospital nursing programs. In 1974, one year after the road was completed, all students from Grade 7-11 were bused to St. Thomas.

All during this period and after the government was still (unofficially) attempting to resettle the community of Clayback Cove, but again they were refusing to move. The community fought for a new school and in 1982, the Integrated Education Council allocated funds for a new school building. The IEC allotted 90% of the funding and District #122 were to put forward the remaining 10%. The district didn't have the 10% and informed the community that they couldn't build the school. The community's reply was that they would construct the school free of cost, if the IEC would supply the building materials. A contract was agreed to between the community and the IEC.

The community patterned a work schedule, which allocated hours to be worked and the specific jobs to be completed by the volunteers. Not one community resident welched or made excuses for not completing his/her assigned voluntary duties. In the spring of 1983, students moved into their new school. In the fall of 1990, eight years after Clayback Cove residents built their school, the Department of education asked school boards in Newfoundland to examine small schools in their districts and to advise why they were not closed. This author was unable to confirm or deny this alleged direction from the Department of Education, but it is the first reason listed on District #122 discussion paper entitled "Reasons to look at Small Schools."

Newfoundland, not unlike other parts of Canada, was witnessing government downsizing and cutbacks. District #122 was placed in a situation of reduced government funding and a reduction in teacher allocations. Coupled with those problems was overall declining enrollment in the whole district and there were some schools which enrolled very few students.

The result was that District #122 in its final analysis decided to single out five of its really small schools for consolidation. Clayback Cove was on that list. Clayback Cove's response was a definite no to their proposed consolidation. The community armed themselves with petitions and presentations affirming that taking young children away from home would jeopardize their overall well-being as growing individuals.

Clayback Cove parents in their protest also stressed and questioned the safety of busing. The residents of Clayback Cove countered arguments of better programming, extra-curricular activities, better facilities put forward by the board, with declarations that they were quite happy with the sound education their children were receiving in Clayback Cove. They felt no adverse effects of multi-grade classrooms in the education of their children.

However, subtle pressure began to arise from the teachers in Clayback Cove, informing the parents that their children could receive a better education in St. Thomas. Those teachers were now living in St. Thomas and commuting to Clayback Cove each day. The case study documented that those teachers didn't want to travel to Clayback Cove. Could their reason of not wanting to commute, influence their decision to encourage the children and parents to move to St. Thomas? Some parents appear to think so.

The superintendent, Mr. Meadows, also indicated that there was a silent minority in the community, who wanted their children bused to St. Thomas. He indicated that after the public meetings, this parent minority would privately indicate to him that they wouldn't object to the move to consolidate. This shows that the community, in its' public performance appeared to be united, but other forces were at work behind the scenes.

Furthermore, Mr. Meadows suggested that because teachers are allocated to the boards in Newfoundland based on student district population and not the number of schools or the ability to offer quality programming to all schools, principals of the larger schools would put pressure on the board not to tamper with the allocation in their schools. Suggestions were forthcoming from those larger schools that students arriving in Grade 7 from those smaller schools would have to be retaught curricula to make them on par with the students in the larger school. There was a belief system that those smaller schools were inferior and before you tamper with teacher allocations in those larger schools, small schools should suffer first. In other words close them and bus the children to the larger school.

This would ensure that the optimum programming remained unchanged in the larger school, if not refurbished because of the additional students added in the consolidation. Also, it is believed that those bussed students would be getting a better education in the bargain.

This appears to be a belief system not only among those school principals, but society in general, and it is this belief system that drives government policy. Clayback Cove residents, as most small communities do, believed differently. The prevailing view in the big town is that schools should be thorough and efficient, but the majority of the residents of Clayback Cove fought for their school because it was the heart of

their community. Clayback Cove's belief system was coming from a different set of cultural rules and traditions, altogether.

On March 12, 1991, Clayback Cove residents had its second meeting concerning the proposed consolidation of the school. The full board was in attendance, Clayback Cove presented a proposal of why their school should not be closed. The Board discussed this proposal and came back to the citizens of Clayback Cove with a tie vote. The chairman of the board, who was Clayback Cove's parish priest, had to vote to break the tie. He voted in favour of Clayback Cove. Clayback Cove would get a reprieve on consolidation for another year.

Yet that May, District # 122 in its allocation of teachers to their schools, decided to reallocate one teaching unit from Clayback Cove to St. Thomas. Along with this teaching unit would go the Grade 6 students, which was three. Two of those students were children of the silent minority, who wanted their children to be bussed to St. Thomas from the beginning.

The following June, 1992, Clayback Cove school closed its doors with little or no opposition from the community. They had been defeated by the Department of Education, which allegedly gave direction to District #122 to close small schools, due to government cutbacks in funding and reduced teacher allocations, teacher pressure from Clayback Cove itself, pressure from the principals of larger schools, and broken

community solidarity. Further to the above reasons, maybe the real reason why Clayback Cove school closed is a societal belief system driven by governments and educators alike that small schools, with their multi-grade classrooms, are inferior to the larger school.

Sheltered Harbour Summary

Sheltered Harbour, unlike Clayback Cove, was not designated as a resettlement community in the 1960's. A gravel road was constructed linking it to the remainder of the province. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, when District # 122 met with parents of Sheltered Harbour to "decide" if their students would be bused, it was only parents of children in junior and senior High school grades that met and voted to send their children to St. Thomas.

Always the basic premise for busing and consolidation was and is insufficient and inadequate programming in small schools, and that better programming can be offered in larger schools, was the case for Sheltered Harbour in the 1970's. This premise of insufficiency has its' belief system rooted in the idea that multi-grade classrooms are inferior to single-grade classrooms. Teachers, superintendents, education departments and society at large appear to share this belief. Again this author firmly feels that, it is this belief system that drives policy to consolidate small

schools. The literature review of this document questioned the reliability and accuracy of proponents who advocate bigger and better schools. In fact, the literature review strongly suggested that school size could possibly be a deterrent to a better education.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, school boards appear to divide or segregate the community on the bases of who was(is) permitted to vote on the issue of busing. In Sheltered Harbour's history from the 1960's and early 1970's, only parents with children who were to be immediately bused were permitted to vote. In Sheltered Harbour a decision was reached in the early 1970's to bus their senior high students to St. Thomas. Parents of junior high, elementary age or pre-school age children were not permitted to vote on this issue. Neither were other members of the community who had no children attending school. This same scenario occurred a few years later when it was decided to bus their junior high students. No parents of elementary school age or pre-school age children were permitted to vote on the issue. Was this a policy decision by the Newfoundland government or District # 122 at that time? Was it a decision that developed in the communities? It warrants investigation because in one recent school consolidation effort in 1996, only parents of school age children voted concerning the consolidation of their small community schools.

In the fall of 1990, Sheltered Harbour was one of the five schools slated to be consolidated by District #122. Like Clayback Cove the residents said no and were

willing to fight to keep their school.

Like Clayback Cove, the main reason given to consolidating Sheltered Harbour was programming, impending government cutbacks in funding and the loss of teachers. Mr. Meadows, however, focused the programming issue, on a belief system that single-grade classrooms were superior to multi-grade classrooms and in his own personal experience of an unsuccessful first year at university. This again is the same venue that junior and senior high students were bused to St. Thomas in the 1970's. We need not question the sincerity and integrity of Mr. Meadows, but that he may be the messenger, as we all may be messengers, of the persuasive James Conant missionaries from the late 1960's and today. James Conant, speaking with Harvard authority, favoured consolidation, and in the past thirty years we have witnessed the demise of small schools and the average size of schools has increased. This trend still continues in Newfoundland and in Sheltered Harbour we witness the political game at its best. Maybe we should adhere, to the spirit of a saying attributed to Abe Lincoln, "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, then we could better judge what to do and how to do it," before "running" to consolidate schools.

Sheltered Harbour held a meeting with the school board officials on March 4, 1991. At this meeting, the community vehemently opposed the board's unofficial proposal to close Sheltered Harbour school and bus their children to Darby. Residents

left that meeting with the impression that they would be notified by board officials of a meeting so they would get an opportunity to present their case before the whole board. On March 14, the board made it official that it would be closing Sheltered Harbour School. Sometime after March 14 a Board meeting was held in St. Thomas and it was at this meeting that Clayback Cove was able to rescind the official motion to close their school. Nobody from Sheltered Harbour attended that meeting. The research indicates that parents of Sheltered Harbour categorically state that they were not aware that this meeting was to have taken place. The research indicated that Clayback Cove parents were there, only because they had someone, not the board, inform them that this meeting was to be held. The people of Sheltered Harbour felt betrayed and jilted. This author was unable to prove or deny Sheltered Harbour's allegations of mistreatment because he was not party to any memos or minutes of this meeting. Yet, it did occur.

Sheltered Harbour then demanded a meeting with the whole board present to offer their viewpoint on the consolidation. On April 10, 1991, residents travelled to the other end of District #122 to make their presentation, but discovered when they arrived, that their request wasn't on the meeting's agenda. They were initially informed that there wasn't time allotted for their presentation. Through discussion at the meeting they were finally permitted to make their presentation. Yet, their chairperson, a teacher, was

informed that because she was not a parent of children in Sheltered Harbour school, she could not speak for the parents of Sheltered Harbour. She was finally permitted to speak, but for only ten minutes, before the chairman of the board cut her off and asked to hear from parents. The parent who finally was appointed to speak was mentally delayed and couldn't offer the communication skills necessary to present the document, according to Sheltered Harbour research.

Sheltered Harbour residents, through all this hassle, finally did muster a notice of motion to rescind the board's decision of March 14, 1991, to officially close the school. Sheltered Harbour residents demanded that the board vote then and there on their motion, but the board chairman said no vote would be forthcoming that night.

The board documentation indicated that a full presentation was made that night by Sheltered Harbour residents, but no mention was made concerning the other circumstances at that meeting.

During the next week, the board dissolved over another political matter and no vote was taken on the notice of motion issued on April 10, 1991. However, on May 8, 1991, a memo was sent to Sheltered Harbour residents saying their school would close in June, 1991. This memo was executed, while an outstanding notice of motion to rescind Sheltered Harbour school, had not gone to a vote. Would this be considered legal under the province's Education Act? Accordingly so, because the Integrated

Education Council, which acted as interim board until a new board was elected, took the position that they would uphold all decisions of the former board.

Sheltered Harbour demanded a meeting immediately and threatened to prevent their children from attending school in September, 1991. No meeting occurred, no communication occurred, and the parents of Sheltered Harbour wouldn't allow their children on the bus to Darby for the week from September 3-6, 1991.

Their protest did not have the cementing effect it desired because some parents began bringing their children to Darby during that week. Furthermore, the Grade 7's were to be bused to Darby instead of St. Thomas, as was the case in previous years. This idea of not sending the Grade 7's to St. Thomas, but busing them closer to Darby, may have been a disclaimer, because maybe if they were allowed to keep their school in Sheltered Harbour, would the Grade 7's be again bussed to St. Thomas much farther away? Now the Grade 7's could return home to lunch from Darby, but if bused to St. Thomas they would have to stay all day. This author is certain that those ideas were floating around during Sheltered Harbour's week of protest.

Sheltered Harbour finally got its meeting on September 6, 1991. No new board was in place, and the I.E.C. official was asked to make a decision on the outstanding notice of motion. He wouldn't do so and indicated that it was the duty of the new board, that would be in place as soon as possible. Sheltered Harbour students went to

school in Darby on September 9, 1991.

The new board was finally in place in November of 1991 and Sheltered Harbour would finally get to make their full presentation and a vote could be held on their outstanding notice of motion. At that meeting, only two people showed up to make the presentation. The notice of motion was voted on and the board upheld the original motion to close the school.

Why did only two people show up at that meeting? The research indicated that the people of the community felt it would have been a complete waste of time because the decision was made. Why kick a dead horse?

Sheltered Harbour school closed because of declining enrollments, government cutbacks in funding and teacher allocations. It closed in the name of better programming and access to better facilities. It closed in the name of single-grade classrooms as opposed to multi-grade classrooms. It closed in the name of economic efficiency because the board indicated in its consolidation proposal on Sheltered Harbour that \$24,000.00 dollars was needed to repair the roof and a new furnace. Today, the roof doesn't leak and the furnace still runs, but each year a bus acquired for the transportation of Sheltered Harbour students, costing \$32,000.00 a year, picks students up and delivers them to Darby and back. Ultimately, it closed because we believe that "bigger is better."

Conclusions

A major policy goal of the provincial government and school boards in Newfoundland and Labrador since the beginning of the 1960's decade, has been the eradication and consolidation of small schools. For the most part, we (the general public) have accepted this policy goal as being in the best interests of students and taxpayers alike.

The two case histories of Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour have established that no institution in Newfoundland appeared more sacrosanct than the local school. Family life often revolved around small neighbourhood schools, where community pride was exhibited as parents watch their children perform in Christmas concerts; or watch with excitement as their sports teams competed against their neighbours from the next community.

For parents of children in those small schools and communities like Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour, this world sometimes overwhelms them, with its vastness and they derive comfort and security from the small domain of the community school. This was one reason why closing a small elementary school was such a severe shock for communities such as Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour. Consolidation, subsequently was a subject that most small rural communities approach with duress, and fought bitterly, all the way.

Both schools in Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour in 1990, were visages of their past, because over time District #122, bit by bit, appropriated their junior and senior high school students and bused them to St. Thomas and Darby. This appropriation of students always occurred under of paradigm of "bigger is better." In the 1970's and 1980's both communities reluctantly agreed to the District's direction, but when District # 122 made it official in 1990, to consolidate Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour schools, parents saw it as their last chance to exercise some control over the education of their children. They strongly fought but eventually lost, this battle, also. They were now fighting, not only to keep their school, but their community, too.

This conflict between Sheltered Harbour, Clayback Cove and District # 122 will be relived, in some fashion, in many small rural schools and communities in Newfoundland in the years to come. Those future consolidation battles will be fought under the same banners of efficiency, equity and equality put forth by the board. The communities will elicit banners of school bus safety, the need for small children to stay close to their parents and the need to save the school-to save the community. Will their be serious discussion of what the literature says about the advantages of small schools? Will there be discussion about what the literature says about the inherent flaws in research studies that cite definite benefits of bigger schools? Probably not, because

school consolidations tend to become emotional affairs couched in jargon and rhetoric.

Having said that, should we continue to administer province wide educational standards nurtured from urban educational settings into rural schools and expect them to perform? This seems like comparing apples and oranges - they are both citrus fruits, both nutritious in their own right. They do, however, come from different trees and provide different tastes. A focused research project needs to be implemented to study rural education in Newfoundland and how rural education is different but can produce academically well-rounded students. Not only do we need a comprehensive examination of education in rural Newfoundland, but we need to do this in conjunction with declining enrolments. Since the middle 1970's, school enrolment in Newfoundland has been declining. School districts that once struggled to cope with over-crowding, temporary facilities, and new construction are facing new headaches caused by the pressures of declining enrolments and subsequently declining funds. The result of these pressures is a growing consensus to close schools.

The wave of consolidation during the seventies tended to urbanize our rural schools and today this tendency still continues. The consolidation movement is strongly supported by professional educators and administrators. Rural communities today, however, are beginning to protest their schools' lost and government policy to close them will become harder and harder, as rural schools and rural communities find

themselves between a rock and a hard place.

Despite their struggle and efforts, the people of Clayback Cove and Sheltered Harbour could not keep their schools open in the end. However, it did highlight some social changes that are still evolving today. First, people are now questioning with growing fervor, the assumed benefits of sending children to larger schools that are purported by school board administrators to be better. Second, more and more community residents, often through their own efforts, are finding out through professional research, the benefits of small school learning. In the future it will likely still be a struggle for people to retain their community schools. But for those armed with research knowledge, and grounded knowledge, their voice, and case will be stronger, and will demand that administrators revise their thinking and direction about closing small schools.

Recommendations for Further Study

Over the past 20 years, declining school enrollments and government policy have resulted in nearly 1000 school closures in Newfoundland. Little research has been done on the effects those school consolidations has had on students and communities who were forced to consolidate. This work suggests that some students upon reaching school leaving age choose to quit school instead of being bused to a new school. Would they have stayed in school, if the school had remained in their

community? A question that requires an answer, since the current 90's trend appears to be moving in that direction. This work also suggests that when communities lose their neighbourhood school, the community loses its identity and dies a slow death. Is this possible?

This work points out, that schools that are first considered for consolidation are 'small' rural schools which are in close proximity to larger communities and larger schools. Busing is the declared option to 'ensure' better educational opportunities for children. In the same vein of innuendo, busing will deliver those same students away from a school that is archaic and an impediment to students' education. School boards cite multi-grades and few teachers as impediments to students acquiring a 'full' education. How then did those schools acquire such impediments?

Those impediments have arisen because over the past decade, school boards in Newfoundland, were allocated classroom or subject teachers based on the total student population in the district. The school board then distributed teacher units to their schools using a government mandated student-teacher ratio of 23:1. If a particular school had a ratio of less than 23:1, the tendency was/is to double up classes and lay-off teachers or move the unit to a larger school in the district. Currently, because of deficit cutting measures and an educational agenda of reform, teaching positions have been reduced province wide. The small school, because it's student-teacher ratio is not

consistent with the provincial formula, is hit first. Along with the reality of declining enrolment, small rural schools get hit so often that the quality of education becomes questionable, and hence the recommendation for consolidation from the board. There is a need then, for research on district based allocation of teaching units and a review of the 23:1 student-teacher ratio, specifically for small schools.

One major problem needs to be addressed before one can focus on the above question and that is a need for a clear definition of a small school. Attempts have been made, but none have been accepted by the legislature and until a definition have been approved by legislative law, school boards and communities will continue to battle the pros and cons of consolidation.

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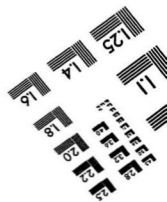
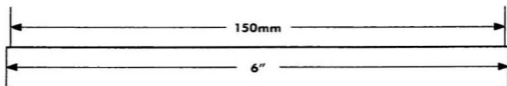
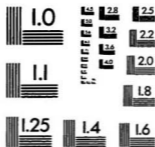
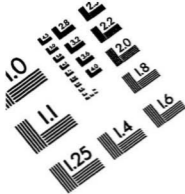
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