

FINDING VOICE:  
FORTY-FIVE YEARS OF STRUGGLE TO KEEP A  
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

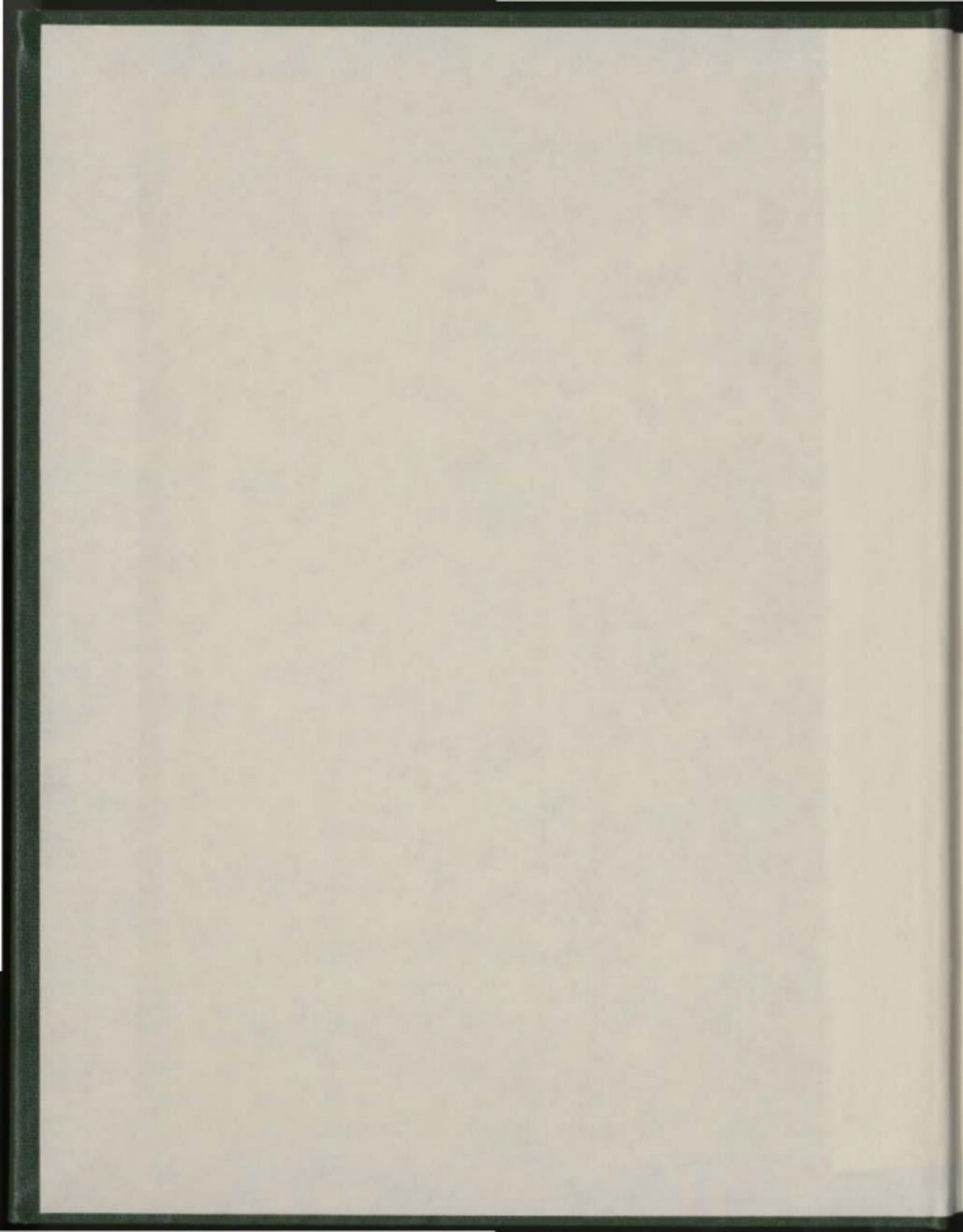
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**Finding Voice: Forty-Five Years of Struggle to Keep a Community School**

by

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The unifying theme of the thesis, one that emerged during the writing of the thesis, is that of a community learning to author its own story and develop its own authoritative voice. The thesis traces a gradual shift in authority from the singular dominant voice of local clergy, to the growing empowerment of the people of Lawn who began their journey as a collection of committed individuals, evolved into authorized groups that spoke for the community, and eventually into vocal groups the authority of which was lodged in provincial legislation. The energy that sustained the struggle was a passionate sense of identity and place that is inherent in the Lawn community culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To my father - a strong,  
staunch, and determined man

## ABSTRACT

The school in the small outport community of Lawn, on the Burin Peninsula in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, has been an integral part of the community, and the community of the school, since its earliest inception, however, several efforts at school consolidation by a series of school authorities have created a fundamental battle ground for community residents. Since 1956, at which time the high school students from Lawn were bussed thirteen kilometers to St. Lawrence, there has been an ongoing community struggle to preserve the Lawn K - 12 school system. This thesis tells the multi-layered story of a small community's struggle to save its school with a particular focus on the reasons for the passion which motivated it.

After the introduction, and a preliminary overview of the academic literature of small schools in Chapter Two, the chapters of this thesis are arranged chronologically to narrate the Lawn school story over its entire history with a focus on the critical periods and the major conflictual events. Chapters Three, Four, and Five are each divided into six sections which depict, sequentially, the multiple layers of the story: the historical landscape of education in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the local situation in Lawn, the public version of the school authority story, the Lawn residents' story, the author's personal school story, and finally the narrative researcher's reflections and ruminations of the multiple layers of each chapter. This pattern of development continues until Chapter Six when the Lawn residents' story begins to merge with the school board story and are told in unison, and consequently, only five sections are developed in this chapter. Chapter Seven tells the author's journey of becoming a narrative researcher and learning a narrative methodology.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE END IS THE BEGINNING

Judy Foote, Education Minister and MHA for the District of Grand Bank, announced today plans for the construction of a new K-12 school in Lawn. "... we established a template for the construction of all new schools that they be designed to enable teachers and students to access new technology and utilize modern teaching and learning techniques that have not been possible in older facilities," said Minister Foote... "The new state-of-the-art school in Lawn will be such a facility." (News release, April 11, 2001, Department of Education)

This long-awaited announcement from Newfoundland and Labrador's Minister of Education on April 11, 2001, brought clear and final resolution to the prolonged impassioned conflict which had gripped the residents of the small rural community of Lawn on the Burin Peninsula for forty-five years. From 1956 to 2001, these residents had struggled with various educational authorities to maintain a school in their small community.

The end of this political story marks the beginning of the writing of this thesis, a narrative inquiry into the story itself. It is a story embedded in my life and central to my personal, professional, and academic growth. Because I have lived intensely this multi-layered experience, my thesis became the vehicle through which I endeavored to achieve resolution of the tensions contained within it. In the meaning-making I discovered that stories are nested within stories: my personal story within the community story, the community story within the local governance story, the governance story within the larger provincial story. Each layer of story is inextricably entangled with the stories that encircle it. This thesis will narrate chronologically five historical periods of the unfolding of these stories.

### **The Context of the Story**

Historically in Newfoundland and Labrador, rural schools were established to meet the needs of people living in rural areas. These schools provided an academic environment where values of rurality, culture, and place were protected and cherished, and where community needs were identified, respected, and met. This is certainly true for the school-community relationship in Lawn, a community on the Burin Peninsula and its school, Holy Name of Mary Academy, a school founded in the Roman Catholic tradition, the predominant religion of the community. The Lawn school system has been an integral part of the community, and the community of the school, since its earliest inception and continues to be so to the present day. This is much evident in the bilateral support that exists between school and community, and the three way intimate, inter-personal relationship that exists among parents, educators, and students.

Despite the close knit relationship among school and community stakeholders, and despite the well documented academic successes of the system, the residents of the community of Lawn have been challenged by a constant struggle with a series of various church leaders and school boards of the times to preserve community schooling. For economic reasons, educational authorities have attempted on at least four occasions since 1955 to relocate the students of Lawn to the school in St. Lawrence some thirteen kilometers distant. However, any relocation plans have repeatedly faced a strong and determined resistance from both parents and community members who believed that the best interests of their children were identified and met in their own community school. What makes the

Lawn case unique is that the struggle to retain the community school endured for forty-five long, difficult years. Provincial governments changed, school boards changed, clergy changed, but the strong belief in community schooling was immutable in the minds of the residents of the community of Lawn. Many years of conflict, hard work, and determined political action finally proved successful for the residents of Lawn when, on April 11, 2001, the Honorable Judy Foote, Minister of Education, announced the construction of a new K-12 school for Lawn. For residents, the battle had been won and the war was finally over.

This thesis tells the story of this rural people, this rural community and their struggle to maintain community schooling amid the turmoil of repeated education reform efforts. In its unfolding, I hope that the story provides some insight and understanding about how a school and a community supported each other and how rural people became empowered to fight both school boards and provincial governments in persistent attempts to control their own destiny. By exploring this particular story, a further understanding is gained of rurality, culture, and place as each pertains to a rural community school and a rural people. The story of the people of Lawn does not stand alone; it is intertwined with the stories of various school board authorities, church authority, and provincial government authority; so the thesis tells the story of the Lawn school within a larger political and social context.

### *Historical Overview*

A school was established in the Community of Lawn as early as 1862 and continued relatively uninterrupted in various buildings until 1956, at which time the local Roman

Catholic priest made a decision to bus the high school students from Lawn to another Catholic school in St. Lawrence some thirteen kilometers distant. High school students continued to be schooled in St. Lawrence until 1960 when they returned to Lawn and were housed in a newly constructed K-12 school. On a second occasion in 1971, promoted by the local clergy and the local school board, an attempt was made to consolidate the Lawn and St. Lawrence schools in St. Lawrence but, attempted consolidation was rejected outright by the community. The students did not move at this time but attempts at consolidation continued into the 1980's and the 1990's. One of the strongest and most determined attempts by the school board to consolidate the schools occurred in 1980, when high school students from Lawn were bussed to St. Lawrence for one year. The 1990's witnessed sweeping changes in educational policies and structures for the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador with several recommendations from local school boards, both Catholic and public, as well as provincial authorities to close the Lawn school. Political action from the community was persistent and persuasive, eventually convincing Government to retain community schooling in Lawn. Minister Foote's announcement signaled the end of Government efforts to close Holy Name of Mary Academy.

### ***Personal Connections***

This is a story that has fascinated me all of my life because I have lived this story. It is a story that has consistently fomented on the surface of my home community even when there was no conflict surrounding the issue. What has fascinated me and is my research

motivation, is that at the center of the story is a small group of rural people who it would seem, would have had little or no voice against the authority of the much larger and more influential religious denomination systems and school boards. Yet, over time, these people became empowered to take control of their own destiny in matters of community schooling. I chose this story as a research topic because I am convinced that it is an important one to document and tell, arising as it did from conflicting interpretations of the centrality of the school to the community.

Dewey conceived of the community as an organic entity with characteristics of its own. These characteristics are no mere sum of its parts. Just as the heart serves the circulatory functions of an organism, so, too, the school serves the educational functions of a community. (Clandinin and Connelly: 1991: 27)

My experience is that the school in Lawn is perceived by community residents as being the heart and soul of the community. Community life is very much intertwined with school life. Having lived the conflict between community residents and school boards for most of my life, I wanted to develop an understanding of the multiple layers of its nature and context.

As a narrative researcher completing this thesis, I had the advantage of viewing this story from many angles. At first, I was a student in the Lawn school system. As such, school was a comfortable place to be and I experienced a great sense of pride and ownership in the school. I vaguely remember hearing about school consolidation in the 1970's and recall that as students we did not take the issue too seriously because the specter of school closure felt remote. As a parent in the 1980's, however, I felt a mix of emotions ranging from fear to anger as attempted consolidation once again became an issue in our lives. I was offended

school in Lawn. Consequently my research began to take on a new focus.

At approximately the same time, I attended a symposium on the *Sustainability of Small Schools Across the North Atlantic Rim* (1999). It was an enlightening experience to sit in a room full of educators, politicians, union leaders, and business people and to hear all of them promote small schools and rural education. It was at that point that I realized that my thesis research was driven more by a personal drive to save a small rural school from closing than an academic need to write a thesis. It was at the symposium that I met Dr. Jean Brown, who shared preliminary findings of a research project which compared rural education in Iceland and Newfoundland. In her concluding statement she suggested the following:

My study during the past year has convinced me that small, rural schools will be part of the educational system in many countries for many years to come. It is out-of-date thinking to consider them as second best and inferior. Staffed by qualified teachers, these schools are in a unique position to offer different but equally valuable educational experiences. With strong ties to the community, they can serve as community centers as well as educational centers. As students require broader programs in high school grades, distance education offers opportunities for advanced study and wider choices. The lesson I have learned from my visit to Iceland is that communities must take responsibility for their own schools. It is community involvement and support, with strong educational leadership at the local level that is needed. (p.18)

Shortly after the Symposium I met with Dr. Brown and she agreed to supervise my work.

The methodology that I had planned to use for my thesis was a traditional qualitative design. During my first meeting with Dr. Brown, I retold the Lawn school story with as much detail and accuracy as possible and at the end of the meeting she pulled a book from her shelf and suggested that this story could be told using a research methodology called narrative

inquiry. She went on to explain that a colleague at Memorial University had just returned from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), having completed a doctoral thesis with narrative expert Dr. Michael Connelly using narrative inquiry methodology. Within an hour I was introduced to Dr. Maureen Dunne and thus my narrative journey began.

### *Narrative Theory*

The intent of my thesis is to document and give form to the efforts of a rural people as they seek to find voice and to become empowered in their struggle against Roman Catholic church dominance and school board bureaucracy. Because of this intent, and because of my personal involvement in the evolution of events during the past three decades, first as a student, then as a parent, and finally as an employee of the education system, the methodology used is the approach of narrative inquiry, the retelling and the reconstruction of the events as they unfolded over a time frame that spanned some forty-five years. A passage from Dunne (1998) captures the underlying premises of narrative methodology as it relates to the purposes of this document. She states:

Researching this thesis requires two dimensions of thinking: a past orientation towards examination of experiences and understandings or central concepts to ascertain how personal theory was formulated; and a future orientation, which in identifying the dialectics still active within the stories, moves me to understand them more fully so I can develop the insight to recognize and hold the paradox. The research itself is in the present, "in the moment and in the act" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1985), an unfolding narrative. (p. 42)

Narrative inquiry may be used not only to investigate subject matter but to uncover meaning.

We use story and its underlying meaning to explain the relationship between past and present

that others external to our community could actually make a decision in our 'best interests', to take and to destroy what was in fact ours; it felt like an invasion, an encroachment on community property. With the consolidation movements that were afoot in the 1990's, my personal struggle became even more intense for now I was placed in a double bind - separating my loyalties to the local school and community as a resident parent living in that community from my loyalties to my employer as a teacher and vice-principal working for the local school board in that community school. The principles and values of the school boards in making their decisions conflicted sharply with the vision of education held by the Lawn residents. There was a transmutation between the message that was being sent by the Board and the one that was being received by the Lawn people. It was within this tension in the dialectic that my thesis began.

#### **Arriving At Narrative Inquiry**

My thesis research started with the topic Information Technology and Its Impact upon a Small Rural School. Although I did not have any deep desire to study the field of information technology, I knew that the Lawn school was under the threat of school closure and I felt that information technology could positively impact the school curriculum and school viability. In the process of researching information technology and rural education, I became fascinated with the work of Paul Nachtigal (1994) and John Townsend (1998) and their ideas about rural schools as centers of learning for the entire rural community. I felt that such a concept of rural education could indeed function and operate well in the small rural

events, between present and future events, and the present is shaped by our concept of the future. Indeed, it is experience interwoven in the past, in the present, and in the person's future plans that give rise to "personal practical knowledge" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988), storied knowledge that guides actions and behaviors.

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define the method of narrative inquiry as "the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both reconfigure the past and create purpose in the future" (p. 18). According to Polkinghorne (1988) this methodology represents "the ordering structure of the events in peoples' lives and is contingent upon the components of causality and time. Meaning derived from narrative consists also of the significance these events have for the narrative in relation to a particular theme" (p.18).

Dunne (1998) says that "narrative research is personal knowledge research with heuristic and participatory consciousness implications and possibilities. In all three approaches, the knower dwells in the known; theory and practice are merged, subjectivity and objectivity are subsumed in the personal" (p. 37). She goes on to say that the "narrative approach gives access to personal meaning because the researcher can examine the earth of her life and the earth of her story" (p. 40). The deep-rooted truth of this statement became more and more evident as I progressed with the documentation of events in the community of Lawn as they related to the education situation. I became more and more aware that my personal experiences were embodied in the total community experience and that my story was immersed in the total Lawn story, and my narrative interpretations of events would be colored

by this lens.

As a narrative researcher I was consciously aware of the multiple layers of each story and quickly realized that multiple perspectives were required continually and that I needed to be cautious about how I told the stories of others, endeavoring to be authentic to the truth of their stories as they saw them. There is a real need for reflective monitoring in narrative research because of "our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light or to alter the past in light of the present" (Bruner, 1990, p. 109). Stories, Dunne (1998) suggests, are

like shifting sands that defy rigidity of structure; the researcher needs to remain responsive to the fluidity within them. In retelling stories, the teller is not only conscious of her audience but she, herself, hears her stories differently. The present context and new knowledge in which she lives affects the interpretation. In its repetitions and reinterpretations, storying provides continuity in her life's events. (p. 42)

Narrative then allows the reader to engage in the lived moments of people's lives. Noddings and Witherell (1991) suggest that

Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments, and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course they remind us about our persistent fallibility. (p. 280)

Ellis and Bochner (2000) capture the power of narrative as follows:

In conversation with our readers, we use storytelling as a method for inviting them to put themselves in our place. Our dialogue centers on moral choices, questions having more to do, as Michael Jackson (1995) observes, with how to live than with how to know. The usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers, who enter from the perspective of their own lives. The narrative rises or falls on

its capacity to provoke readers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on their own experience, enter empathically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become co-performers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text. (p. 748)

They further state that, "Life and narrative are inextricably connected. Life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it. Narrative is both about life and part of it" (p. 745). It is in this narrative context that the Lawn story unfolds.

### *Narrative Methodology*

My research is a narrative inquiry, but embodies also some traditional elements of research design as I personally evolved from one research paradigm to another in the course of the thesis writing. The form of the thesis indeed tells its own story.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe narrative inquiry as evocative stories which activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They further state that,

The texts produced under the rubric of what is called narrative inquiry would be stories that create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life's unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one's meanings and values into question. (p. 744)

This phenomenon occurs both within the community as a collective story and within myself as I write this thesis.

As the layers of each chapter of my thesis unfolded, I came to realize that there were

multiple stories ongoing simultaneously and that I had to tell the Lawn school story within the context of a larger political and social story. The shape of the school story was usually a response to external pressures from local clergy, school boards or provincial reform movements so it became necessary to identify the competing stories - the versions of the Lawn school story told by local school authorities and provincial educational authorities. Because it was a personal story, I needed also to tell my version. Five layers of the story are placed concurrently in each chapter: the provincial context, the Lawn context, the local school authority story, the Lawn resident story, and my personal story. Each story layer required a different type of research activity.

In relating the provincial context, I examined all official documentation related to educational reform and reorganization as well as policy on rural and small schools as published by the provincial Department of Education. I also reviewed newspaper accounts of small school issues, reform consultations and events related to the specific situation in Lawn, as well as reports from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association regarding their position on educational reform and small schools.

In telling the local governance authority story I examined the minutes of meetings from the Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula dating from July 17, 1970 to December, 1996 and the minutes of meetings from the new consolidated Burin Peninsula School Board from January, 1997 to March, 2001. I also reviewed consultation documents related to consolidation issues on the Burin Peninsula, both from the provincial perspective and the local perspective.

To unearth the Lawn story, I reviewed Lawn Town Council records dating from 1970 to 2000, read any relevant material in the local gazette, and viewed videotapes of local events. I conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-six Lawn residents, including the Mayor of Lawn, the former Chairman of Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council, the former Chairman of the Holy Name Society (the local Catholic men's association), former St. Lawrence transfer students who are currently parents living in Lawn, and current community residents. I interviewed the local parish priest who served the community at the dramatic height of the school conflict in 1980 and he personally recollected his interpretation of the events surrounding the Lawn story. (Note: All collection of individual stories was in compliance with Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS); all participants were entitled to fundamental rights of privacy and the freedom to make informed choices about participation in the research.)

To tell my personal story, I listened intently to the stories of school from my siblings and my mother. I reviewed personal journal entries, and I reflected upon my lived experience of school consolidation issues in Lawn, attempting to narrate and reflect upon my stories of this phenomenon. At the end of each chapter I incorporated my reflections and ruminations into a consideration of the connectedness of the multiple layers of the story attempting to identify multiple themes. Finally, I included in my interpretation a reflection on the process of writing a thesis as a narrative researcher

## Overview of the Chapters

After the introduction and a preliminary overview of the academic literature of small schools in Chapter Two, the chapters of this thesis are arranged chronologically in order to narrate the Lawn school story over its entire history with a focus on the critical periods and the major points of conflict as the story unfolds. Chapters Three, Four and Five are each divided into six sections which depict, sequentially, the multiple layers of story: the historical landscape of education in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the local situation in Lawn, the public version of the school authority story, the Lawn residents' story, my personal school story, and finally the narrative researcher's reflections and ruminations on the multiple layers of each chapter. This pattern of development continues until Chapter Six when the Lawn residents' story begins to merge with the school board story and are told in unison, and therefore, only four sections are evident in this chapter.

Chapter Two represents the starting point of this thesis. I began with a literature review of small schools to place my study in the larger context. It includes a review of the early establishment of rural schools, and the impact of centralization, bureaucratization, and information technology on rural schools. The review is organized around two dominant themes that emerged during the reading of the literature: the centrality of the school to the local community and its residents' sense of place, and secondly, the importance of the rural school to community development. The more I examined the literature, however, the more I felt driven to tell the story of the Lawn school in a holistic, multi-layered way. The literature tends to fragment the small schools' phenomenon. I wanted to explore a whole story,

examining various aspects of its complexity. The chapter remains as written, however, because this work precedes my shift to narrative inquiry.

Chapter Three stories the period between 1956 and 1962 and provides an overview of what was happening from the beginning of the consolidation movement in Lawn to the opening of a new school in 1962. It documents the historical landscape, the stories of the Lawn residents regarding their experiences, and the official school authority story which was the voice of single priest, during this period. As well, this chapter serves to introduce my family story of schooling in Lawn during this time frame. The chapter concludes with a reflection piece on the patterns of this era.

Chapter Four stories the period between 1962 and 1980 and demonstrates that the dissenting voices of the people are becoming louder on the issue of school consolidation. In the school authority story, a transition emerges in which the power of authority shifts from the singular dominant voice of the priest to the combined voices of both priest and denominational school board. The historical overview manifests the organizational change in the Province's education system during this time. My personal section in Chapter Four is written from the perspective of a student attending the school in Lawn during the 1970's.

Chapter Five discusses the school situation in Lawn during 1980, one of the most intense and controversial periods in the history of schooling in Lawn, and as such it required in its telling the space of an entire chapter. In this chapter, dissension mounts between the dominant voice of the official school authority and the united voices of the people of Lawn. In the midst of turmoil, both sides reach an impasse and, subsequently, a compromise.

In Chapter Six, the format of the preceding chapters shifts to one in which there is a blending of stories between the people of Lawn and the official school authority. This became necessary because of a shift in position of the local school board who began to support the parent/resident point of view. As a result, as I attempted to write this chapter I had difficulty separating the voices of the school board from those of the people. The stories seemed to be a unified strategic effort and as such the stories demanded to be told together. Chapter Six as well narrates the conclusion of the old story of school consolidation in Lawn.

Chapter Seven tells my journey of becoming a narrative researcher, of learning a narrative methodology and of facing the challenge of analyzing others' stories while attempting to be respectful of the telling of these stories.

### **Emerging Themes**

Narrative research begins with the story, it begins in the middle so to speak, and a theoretical framework may emerge from the telling of the story. In the research telling of these multiple stories several patterns begin to emerge and a theme develops. This is a story of a community learning to author its own story and, therefore, developing its own voice of authority. There is a gradual shift in power and authority which began with the singular dominant voice of the local priest and the response of a silent lay community. Each episode or era marks a gradual adjustment of the scales of justice, which began heavily weighted with the authority voices of church and, later, the school board. As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that the people of Lawn became empowered first as an unofficial but determined

opportunity for future generations. Rural Newfoundland exists; therefore, both Governments and local people need to recognize the strengths of rurality and the importance of a 'sense of place' in the lives of people. For me personally, this story demonstrates the power that can exist when people believe in themselves, stand united, and continually struggle to find a voice amidst the many powerful and competing voices in society. This is a story of school, of culture, of place, and of heart.

collection of individuals, a situation which evolved over time into locally organized and authorized groups which spoke for community, and eventually into vocal groups the authority of which was lodged in provincial legislation. These groups, especially school councils, existed initially in dissent with local authorities, but came to eventual agreement with local authorities and later, the provincial government. The balance shifted, and the voices of the rural residents emerged with an unprecedented strength and authority. The energy that sustained the struggle was a passionate sense of identity and place that is inherent in the community culture.

### ***Conclusion***

I hope my research accomplishes three purposes: firstly, that it gives voice to the local people and to the spirit of perseverance that has contributed to maintaining a school and a way of life through forty-five years of adversity; secondly, makes a substantial contribution to the field of knowledge about the nature of the rural school and its relationship to community; and thirdly, that it relates a story, historically connecting the public official story to the private, personal story that was unfolding within the community story.

I am very closely connected to this story in many ways. As a Lawn resident who has lived this story for most of my life, I believe that the Lawn story captures the strength, determination, and the potential that exists in the Newfoundland character. As a Newfoundlander who holds strong beliefs in the cultural ties that inherently bind us as a Newfoundland people, I believe that rural Newfoundland has the potential to be an oasis of

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LOCATING THE STORY IN RURAL SCHOOL LITERATURE**

This chapter was written early in the thesis process. It is narrative in form only in so far as it narrates the North American development and understanding of the place of rural schooling in the American and Canadian context. This chapter will review the roots of rural schooling and then focus on two dominant themes that emerge in most literature on rural schooling. One focus is on the centrality of the school to community life. It emphasizes the sense of place, of ownership, and belonging that characterizes rural schools. The other dominant theme articulates the importance of the rural school to community development.

Lawn residents, struggling to maintain their community school, believe in the importance of local community; they believe in developing a sense of place; and that it is in the best interests of their children to be educated within their community. They also understand their school as being an essential ingredient in their plans for community development. To this end many have devoted the better part of their lives to the preservation of the rural community school and the rural way of life.

#### **The Roots Of The Rural School**

Rural schools were established to serve what were considered to be the needs of rural people. The early rural schools were assigned the tasks of preparing children for the demands of a changing society. Cross and Frankcombe (1994) found the following:

In Europe, Asia, and the Arabic world, schools began as an adjunct to the

greater religious institutions, to the necessity of producing people who could transmit gospels and learned discourse. In Canada and Australia though, schools grew out of the demands made first by early exploiters of those countries natural wealth, and later by early settlers that their children be educated to function in a world increasingly demanding literacy and numeracy. In Canada various religious groups set up schools in the new settlements, melding their religious instruction with the learning necessary for various vocational needs. The society for the Popularization of the Gospel set up schools in BonVista, Newfoundland in 1722; in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia in 1727; and Kent County, New Brunswick in 1871. (p. 24)

The school in Lawn was born of the same types of reasons with economic purposes and religious aims. These historic connections are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

The connection between school and society is deeply rooted in the history of rural schools. Society's conceived needs, whether they be religious, academic, or social, were often met inside the rural school. These schools were rooted not in urban beginnings but in rural ones. School and community were tightly linked. In 1872 *The Free Public School Act* of British Columbia stated the purpose of education as:

To give every child in the province such knowledge as will fit him to become a useful and intelligent citizen in later years. In this statement we see the genesis of social contract that governs public education in Canada. This contract ensures the right of all children to participate in public schooling regardless of where they might live within the jurisdiction - a guarantee that upholds the right of some form of equality in education for rural students. (p. 62).

Initially, the rural school was established to serve the needs of rural people and was the center of activity for the rural community. However, somewhere between then and now, a movement began in which the focus shifted away from the original thinking about rural schools serving the needs of rural people, and the rural school began to be viewed as somehow 'inferior' to the 'bigger' and 'better' urban model. Tyack's study (as cited in Cross

and Frankcombe, 1994), suggests that,

In 1896,( in the United States) the infamous Committee of Twelve completed a year long study of the Rural School Problem, concluding that rural schools were wasteful and inferior. The proposed solution was to centralize and bureaucratize management of schools through consolidation, and to upgrade academic standards through the professionalization of teaching. (p.26)

This article precipitates a movement towards centralization that became so effective that Kannapel and Deyoung (1999) suggest that, "over the past 100 years, this solution has been so effectively implemented that large, centralized school systems controlled by professionals are the accepted standard for both urban and rural schools" (p. 70). They further state that,

Hand-wringing about the state of America's schools continues, but education reformers and policymakers today are primarily concerned about the urban schools that a century ago were the professional models for educational excellence. They argue that centralization, bureaucratization, and professionalization of schools has resulted in a relatively uniform model of schooling, but this model has failed to deliver on many of the promises made to parents and communities in many rural and urban settings. Not mindful that a century of generic reforms unresponsive to local contexts has proven inadequate, many national and state school reform leaders today continue to suggest that schools across the country are plagued by generic sorts of problems that, once again, can be fixed with generic sorts of solutions. (p.72)

Kannapel and Deyoung conclude that the lessons of 100 years go unlearned among educators themselves. The strong social link between schools and their communities, the heart of rural interaction, has been eroded over time.

One wonders what the status of rural schools and rural communities would be today if in the past 100 years, rural people, educators, and governments had continued to build on the original conception of rural schools and had continued to invest in the needs of rural people. The rural school exists today in an ever changing global community where the demographic, social, economic, and technological changes are placing new demands upon

schooling. In a sense, like the early settlers of the past, a new course is being charted in rural education. In meeting the present challenges, Kannapel and Deyoung (1999) suggest that educational planners should endeavor to , “be responsive to the unique needs of rural schools and communities, and build on the strengths of rural settings” (p.67). As evidenced by the past, any problem which exists in rural schools or urban schools cannot be solved by generic solutions. Each is a unique system with its own strengths and challenges and these need to be tapped in order to serve the needs of both rural and urban people. In rural education, the deeply rooted relationship between school and community could be viewed as a ‘living model’ for urban schools. Schools are about preparing the student to live and work within both the local and the global community and must be responsive to local needs. Kannapel and Deyoung conclude,

Many rural education researchers and analysts today lament the decline of small, rural schools that served as centers of the community. Moreover, they believe that the current reform agenda (now dominated by an approach known as “systemic reform”) is but another example of a generic reform imposed on all schools. They call for school improvement efforts that are responsive to the unique needs of rural schools and communities, and that build on the strengths of rural settings. (p.68)

Instead of focusing on the generic, some research supports educational change which preserves the unique aspects of rural schools.

### **The Centrality of School To Community**

A review of the literature of rural schooling reveals an iterative debate on ‘whom does the school serve’ - the individual, the community or the state? There appears to be no debate, however, that it is central to all three.

This centrality traces back to ancient Greece. Theobald (1997) offers ancient Greece as an example of a community-oriented system. He asserts that,

The Greeks lived their lives in service to the community rather than in service to their own individual wishes and desires. Their rationale was that order and harmony could be preserved by working toward the common good. He states that this orientation was reversed in the eighteenth century, when modern liberals advanced the notion that community needs were best served through the pursuit of individual desires. (p. 9)

The centrality of schools to communities is also proposed by philosopher John Dewey, who believed that schools should function as miniature communities in which students dealt with real life problems; that cooperative living in miniature would provide the setting for the development of the intellect. This he believed would result in intelligent social action, thus leading to a better society (In Kliebard, 1995).

The struggle between the needs of the individual, the community, and the nation is considered by Dunne (1983) who argues that, "the tension between the desire for local control and the reality of a national culture is ever-present in America. It is this tension that is at the heart of the battle for school reform - and not just rural school reform" (p. 71). Some rural education scholars, however, have decried the use of schools to serve national goals (DeYoung, 1995b; Howley, 1997). Howley and Howley (1995) lament the fact that "the current education reform movement is aimed at making the United States economically competitive, when economic goals ought not to be the primary one for our schools" (p. 72).

In their literature review on rural schooling, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) ascribe the reasons for the 'rural problem' as being lodged in the tensions in this debate. They say that "the rural school problem today as portrayed by many scholars in the field, is that rural

schools have endured 100 years of assault from outside reformers in search of the 'one best system' and that this assault continues to this day" (p.70) . The problem according to these authors is that educational reforms attempt to integrate rural schools into a national educational system and as such the question remains concerning whose needs the school serves.

Not only are rural schools faced with trying to piece together and capitalize on the remnants of their remaining uniqueness but must do so under a barrage of ongoing reforms that seek to integrate rural schools into a national system of schooling . At issue is the complex question of who the schools should serve - the local community, the larger society or some combination of both. (p. 70)

As the debate over 'who the schools should serve' continues within educational circles and within the larger society, some rural schools despite the odds continue to progress and transform while others become lost in the shuffle. As Rosenfield and Sher (1997) point out educators became trapped between Dewey's philosophy and the simultaneous push for economy, efficiency, and sound business management in the school.

Mulcahy (1999), a Newfoundland rural educator, expresses how this conflict plays itself out in the local arena. In speaking to the Burin Peninsula School Board, he listed three reasons why small community schools are closed or consolidated: "limited course offerings, low achievement, and economies of scale" (p. 2). His conclusion was that "there is an increasing realization among educators that bigger schools may in fact not be better schools and this push for more and more course offerings has not in fact improved the quality of education for children" (p.6). Monk (as cited in Mulcahy) and his colleagues at Cornell University, leading researchers in the area, state " the curriculum argument for consolidation

has been significantly overstated" (p. 36). Among the points stressed by Monk, and others, are: a narrowly focused academic curriculum can produce high levels of achievement even when enrolments are quite small; offering a large number of courses is only marginally related to offering a good education; the number of courses offered has no relationship to the quality of instruction; challenging students widely and deeply with fewer well-taught courses which take into consideration the different capabilities and aspirations of the students will advance learning a good deal more than simply focusing on provision of a multitude of courses.

Rural schooling is caught then in the dialectic between local convictions and national goals, between local ownership and government centralization. Small schools most frequently, as in Newfoundland and Labrador, experience a strong sense of local ownership but are governed by external sources, agents of the provincial government. Rural schools are challenged by their need both to nurture a sense of place, of individual and community identity and also to enhance their connections to the outside world and its governing authorities, enabling its citizens to take their place in the larger economic and cultural sphere of which they are also an integral part. The next section of this literature review explores in particular these two themes of the centrality of rural schooling: firstly, the sense of place that is indigent to rural schools and, secondly, the importance of the rural school to community and economic development.

### *A Sense of Place*

Significant scholarship has emerged in the arena of place and identity (Hummon, 1990; Lutz and Merz, 1992; Orr, 1992; Perin, 1977). Orr (1992) argues that all persons, scholars

and lay persons alike need “to develop a more active understanding of place, including an intentional involvement with place. Attending to place and the interrelationship between all of its parts compresses the fundamental work of living ‘sustainability’” (p. 130). Orr (1993) contrasts, “good inhabitation” with mere “residency”. The former requires “detailed knowledge of a place.... and a sense of care and rootedness,” where the latter requires only “cash and a map” ( p. 130). He demonstrates that “some people achieve a deep connection with a place, while others merely pass through ( albeit potentially for a duration of many years). Those who establish a deep connection, in Hummon’s (1990) and Perin’s (1977) conceptions, may define their identity through that place”(p.80).

Mary Bushnell (1999) studied an American nondenominational independent school founded by parents in 1984. Their motivation for founding the school rested on three concerns, all of them connected to nurturing a sense of place for their children. First, public school redistricting required their elementary age children, including those in kindergarten, to ride the bus 45-60 minutes (one way) to school; the parents felt the distance too great for young children. Second, parents preferred their children to attend a smaller school than the new elementary school formed by redistricting. Third, parents wanted to play a greater role in their children’s education than they believed was possible in local public schools. They described feeling pushed out of the process of educational decision-making because they were not education experts and they felt that the School Board dismissed their desire to keep a small school because they could not prove that small schools were better. Bushnell states that,

You sense that (their school is) different and unique. The first time you set

foot on the grounds you're looking at these log buildings that have been assembled. The whole atmosphere is a country school. According to residents, Oakleaf County School provides a rural sense of place through its "character". Other "rural activities" at the school include day hikes and overnight backpacking trips in the nearby mountains. Students keep a small vegetable garden on the school grounds. Once a year, students, teachers and parents spend a day fishing, painting, and crafts before camping out at a local 4H camp. The school hosts a May Day celebration in which students dance around a may pole festooned with flowers and garlands. (p.84)

These and other events link students to the local place through an emphasis on the outdoor environment and, at times, the daily life of the community. Bushnell notes that, "replaced urbanites name many reasons why they moved to Oakleaf region, including privacy, safety, a slower lifestyle, the physical setting, a 'positive place' in which to raise children, and in general a desire to live in the country"(p. 85).

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) emphasize the role that rural schooling can play in fostering community sustainability by building upon a sense of place.

In this endeavor, schools must acknowledge that people's lives are situated in particular sites, encompassing unique social, cultural, and economic relations, even as they are integrated into more global processes. Education must both shape and be guided by a re-conceptualization and re-creation of community life. Schools can be central to the reconstruction of rural life by integrating learners into daily community life and providing opportunities for "learning to live well in community." Consequently, healthy communities require schools that are guided by an ethic of responsibility to the people and places they are intended to serve. (p.135)

A sense of place, then, is integral to community development.

The following statement from Theobald (1995), while lengthy, captures the essence of the importance of place in schooling.

To appreciably attend to the 'needs' of students, schools must contribute to the re-creation of communities. Understanding one's place is critical to this re-creation. It ought to be the chief curricular focus in schools for several

reasons. First, it promotes the time-tested learning power of combining the intellect with experience. Second, the study of place addresses the shortcomings inherent in our overly specialized, discipline-based view of knowledge. Third, it has significance for resocializing people into the art of living well where they are. Finally, knowledge of place—where you are and where you come from—is intertwined with knowledge of self. Place holds the promise of contributing to the development of meaningful identity, something far more substantive than the identity that is derived from one's ability to accumulate material goods.

Focusing on place, using the community as a curricular lens, not only contributes to re-creating community, but it will also help realize true school renewal—first, by making learning more experiential and therefore more powerful, and second, by providing youth with an ability to understand who they are and how they might be in the world. The more students understand their community and its environs—its social structure, its economy, its history, its music, its ecology—the more they become invested in that community. Such investment increases the likelihood that they will find ways to either stay in or return to the community. The significance here is not just that one small place is saved, but that the character of our national culture is transformed in the process. Indeed, the promise of rural education renewal is that it can start us all on the road to a more sustainable future. (p. 2)

The research on the importance of the school in creating and sustaining a sense of place leads to the conclusion that the needs of rural schools differ from the needs of schools in more urban areas.

Several scholars have suggested that rural school improvement efforts should capitalize on one of the major strengths of rural schools: the strong links among school, community, and place (Haas and Lambert 1995; Herzog and Pittman, 1995; Howley, 1997; Howley and Howley, 1995; Rosenfield, 1983; Theobald and Nachtigal, 1995). This importance of a sense of place and the difference between the needs of rural and urban schools was recognized in the report of the Ministerial Panel on Education Delivery in the Classrooms of Newfoundland and Labrador (Sparks and Williams, 2000) which affirms that,

There is a need to strengthen the delivery of education in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The education system must provide a level of service which removes barriers so that all students regardless of the location of their community, are able to access an essential program. There can be no doubt that the greatest inequality in the provision of public services is the equal treatment of unequals. In this regard the Panel believes that the recognition of the special circumstances of rural schools should be reflected in the teacher allocation model. There is precedence in other Canadian jurisdictions where numerous examples of special provisions to address the needs of schools in rural communities can be found. A recent review of elementary-secondary educational financing across Canada found that many jurisdictions use special adjustments to provide additional resources for rural or remote areas, areas of decreasing student population, and areas with poor socio-economic conditions. Through these special adjustments, provinces recognize the importance of safeguarding educational equity. The Panel agrees with this principle. (p. 43)

This principle was foundational to the decision by the provincial government in the year following publication of this document to establish a permanent school in the community of Lawn.

### **The Rural School and Community Development**

The rural school is often viewed as the center of the rural community serving not only the academic needs but also serving the social, and cultural needs of the community. There is a strong sense of community within the school, and the school often serves as the cultural and social center of the town (DeYoung and Lawrence, 1995; Dunne, 1977,1983; Herzog and Harmon, 1995; Stern, 1994). Extracurricular or non-academic activities are often valued as much as or more than academics (DeYoung, 1995b; Nachtigal, 1982a; Pershkin, 1978; Stern, 1994), and a higher population of students participate in extra curricular activities than in

urban schools (Nachtigal, 1982a; Sher and Tompkins, 1977). Rural schools reflect the economic and social stratification of their communities, and are influenced more strongly by the cultural and economic outlook of the community (Seal and Harmon, 1995).

Nachtigal (1995) suggests that, "If rural schools are to become important players in community development we need to (1) reconsider how we think about the purposes of schooling; (2) shift the focus of the curriculum at least in part from a generic, national-focused curriculum to one that focuses on the local community context; (3) educate students so that they have the skills to create their own jobs rather than being prepared only to find jobs and (4) use the investments in facilities and other resources available in the school to support entrepreneurship and community development". Nachtigal further suggests that, "Rural communities have become disempowered both politically and economically. Unless rural people begin to make some decisions on their own behalf, the future of rural communities is dim indeed"(p. 73).

Mulkey ( 1992) examined the role of schools in rural community development. He suggests the following: rural schools should expand their mission to include the broader educational needs of the community; rural schools should teach people (students and community members) about their community and how it works; schools should focus on preparing rural residents to accept and use modern technology; schools should focus on the development of leadership skills and entrepreneurial abilities; schools should provide leadership in the program designed to increase public awareness of community educational needs and the importance of education to individual and community development. In this view, it becomes necessary for educators to re-think their ideologically based assumptions

about rural schools and their functions in community.

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) would support Mulkey's suggestions. They suggest that "re-creating communities through the adoption of a new set of cultural assumptions grounded in ecologically sustainable practices will require the redesign of schooling. That design will begin at least in part on the local context, the place where community is" (p. 134). Theobald and Nachtigal further explain that "the work of the rural school is no longer to emulate the urban or suburban school, but to attend to its own people" (p. 135). They point out that the classroom environment in even the most isolated rural schools can be enhanced by satellite communication and can be made available to the average rural citizen. This theme is also developed by Hyman, Gamm and Shingler (1995) who examine what they call a "paradigm gridlock" in which they state that "emerging policies must deal with the full range of community life including health, social, educational, cultural, recreation, infrastructure, economic, and housing systems" (p. 104). They further believe that modern technology can make 'rural development' possible while respecting agriculture, open spaces, the natural environment, and above all, people.

According to the Royal Commission Report on Education in Newfoundland and Labrador (1992) one of the challenges of the new system of education in Newfoundland is "to provide for an education system that is dynamic, responsive, flexible, and committed to self improvement" (p. 108). If the system to be developed is flexible, responsive and dynamic, then educational planners will not find themselves in a position of subscribing to the past. They will be able to respond much more effectively to the needs of rural schools serving rural peoples.

According to Haas and Lambert (1995), improvement projects that are truly rural (a) are grounded in a sense of place; (b) value outcomes arising from individual situations, rather than predetermined, specific results; (c) invite contributions from those who are usually marginalized in community development and reform efforts; (d) are systemic, comprehensive, long-term, multifaceted; and (e) are grounded in and energized by a moral stance of rural communities and schools strengthening themselves (p. 412).

Over the last few years, a number of developing countries have been trying to facilitate the provision of a range of community services on school sites, including adult education and other social and welfare services. Several reasons account for this phenomenon. Schools and educational facilities are increasingly sophisticated and expensive, and local communities want to have better access to them. The provision of integrated services could play a significant role in helping achieve "lifelong learning" (Townshend, 1999).

Piper(1999) examined small rural schools in the context of the global community.

Central to the survival of a rural community is a thriving school, a school that provides not only the basic skills needed for the workplace but educates future citizens for a lifetime of changing work and more importantly, educates them for the fullness and richness of living. Moreover, I want to argue that rural schools are at the heart of not only the rural community, but potentially of the global one. This is the structure of my argument: - people go where there are jobs; most jobs are in cities, but there is some evidence that people are beginning to return to small communities; and their doing so will depend on a number of factors, not the least of is the availability of schooling. (p.3)

Piper further states that, " The school needs the community and without its school the community will eventually die. In order to survive and ensure that its community thrives the school will have minimally: to provide educational opportunity at least equal to that in the urban centers; to prepare workers for the local and global economy; to serve as centers for

community life-long learning” (p. 3).

In an article “Social Forces Shaping the Future of Rural Areas”, Kenneth P. Wilkinson (1997) suggests the following:

The future of the rural community is being molded in large part by a wave of technological, economic, and political changes that could either reduce the social and economic disadvantages associated with remote location and small - scale social organizations or leave rural communities even further behind in the future than they have been in the past. (p.65)

He further explains that communities need to be able to effectively cope with the changes affecting community life and to collectively take action to achieve the community goals.

It is not enough to solve particular problems; what is needed is to improve the overall capacity of the community to cope with changes affecting local life. More than anything else rural communities need to be able to “act”(Luloff, 1990), that is, to organize and carry out projects on their own behalf by deciding among alternative scenarios of the future and undertaking collective actions to pursue the goals they select. (p 80)

The results of rural community development as a focus of rural schools can indeed reach far beyond the bounds of the local community.

### ***Conclusion***

Community schools in the twenty-first century can be learning centers which promote life-long learning for the entire community. The literature clearly suggests the school’s importance in fostering a sense of place and in community development as well as the importance of local community within the global community. The rural school can be used as an education facility for parents, pre-schoolers, K-12 students, and community members and it can serve integrative purposes for community services such as health care, daycare and social services. Because of technology, the once isolated rural school can now connect on

a daily basis to the global community. There has already been a shift in the boundaries surrounding the rural school and the rural community. A rural school can be a very viable part of both the local and global community if people choose to make it viable - above all else it must be recognized that schools and communities are about people and that rural people should play a major role in any decision that could affect their destiny.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**ONE VOICE ON THE LANDSCAPE**  
**1956 - 1962**

This chapter examines several layers of stories that were unfolding during this historical period. The early beginnings of rural schooling in Newfoundland are discussed, followed by the historical context of the Lawn community school. The local school authority voice is described, and the response of the residents of Lawn. Finally, I insert my personal story, a child's perspective, and conclude with reflections on the events of this six year period.

**The Context: Education in Newfoundland 1947 - 1962**

Newfoundland's history is laced with tales of joy and jubilation, honor and glory, disaster and tragedy, and struggle and strife. It is a province shaped by the cultural lives of the generations of people who were bound and determined to live along her rugged coastal shores. The educational structures which emerged within the Newfoundland environment were deeply rooted in the history of the island people. In the period between 1497 and 1962, the various churches played a strategic role in the establishment and development of education not only in rural Newfoundland but in more urban ones as well. These early beginnings of education stemmed from Newfoundland's early settlement patterns.

Since permanent settlement was discouraged (Rowe, 1952), there was little or no attempt to establish a provincial education system. Fish, not education, was Newfoundland's commodity. It was not the intent of England's ruling class to establish settlement, to

encourage education, or to invest in the colony of Newfoundland. Parsons (1964) concluded:

Small wonder then that, in spite of Sir Humphry Gilbert's proclamation in 1583 that "this land belonged to England", Newfoundland was at that time and remained for centuries little more than a 'no man's' land....(in which) the interest of any people who might wish to settle....were subordinated to the interests of these western adventurers. (p.2)

Yet, despite the obstacles, settlement did occur in Newfoundland as many of the early settlers set up permanent residence along the coastline often in places that were hidden from English authority. Under these circumstances it was next to impossible to establish an official education system. The system that did evolve found its roots in the doctrine of various church denominations.

Under the conditions that existed in the early days of Newfoundland's history, it is apparent that little attention was given to education. As Burke (1937) reported "little....effort was made to improve the morals and intelligence of those settlers by the Government of England. It was left to the private institution to commence the work" (p. 287). In Newfoundland those efforts came first from the churches. According to McCarthy (1991), the first recorded agreement concerning the education of children in Newfoundland was drawn up in the summer of 1686 at Placentia and St. Pierre [a small island off the southeast coast of Newfoundland that has remained under French authority]. "Under this agreement the two fledgling French colonies promised to support a priest who would make all the ecclesiastical functions and instruct the children for at least four months of the year" (p. 3). Several societies were formed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to tackle the education problem. Rowe (1964) states that the principal ones were: "the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; the Society for Improving the Conditions of the

Poor in St. John's; the Benevolent Irish Society; and the Newfoundland School Society" (p. 26). McCarthy (1991) states that, "In 1744 the Newfoundland School Society established a school in St. John's and by 1824 had established schools in all of the larger Newfoundland outport communities, and even in some of the smaller ones" (p. 4).

As part of the Terms of Union with Canada in 1949, Term 17 confirmed the right of the churches to own and operate their own schools. Backer (1994) wrote, "Premier J. R. Smallwood's government retained the denominational education system in an attempt to mollify the opposition of Roman Catholics to Confederation, and established a Department of Education along historical lines" (p.105). From 1832 then, until the 1996 amendment to Term 17 of the 1949 Terms of Agreement of Newfoundland's entry into Confederation with Canada, Newfoundland's system of education was a public system of education based on a denominational framework which evolved in the province over a century as permanent settlement evolved. It was in the context of this denominational framework that formalized schooling began in the community of Lawn.

#### **Lawn and its Landscape (1956-1962)**

The community of Lawn is located in Placentia Bay on the South Coast of Newfoundland. The economic base of the Town of Lawn has traditionally, and continues presently, to be based on the inshore fishery. Although the town was first settled sometime after 1763, the first official census reported for Lawn was in 1836 and the earliest record of a school in Lawn was in 1840. The first Board of Education for the Electoral District of Burin was appointed by the Governor of Newfoundland on May 24, 1836 ( Marshall, 1984). The

Journal of the Legislative Council of Newfoundland, 1933-41 reports that at Lawn, "a teacher has been engaged for twelve months. The school opened on the first of May, 1840" (Journal of Legislative Council, 1941). The Journal of the House of Assembly reports no schools in that community throughout the years of 1844 through 1860 although on several occasions "the chairman was desirous of establishing a school there"(Journal of House of Assembly, 1860). In 1861, Mr. M. Kelly, Inspector for the Roman Catholic School Boards reported that:

The Lawn school continues to be taught by Miss Sparrow and was taught in the Chapel during the summer. The Chairman Rev. J. Cullen informed me that he expected a school house lately built there would be completed in the fall so as to have school here during the winter.

(Journal of the House of Assembly, 1862).

From 1862, the school at Lawn continued to exist; thirty-five pupils were enrolled in 1867, in "a school house newly shingled and repaired". There were sixty-three pupils by 1884, but only thirty-eight in 1891 (Journal of House of Assembly, 1891). The first schools in Lawn were one room buildings. In 1945, a new two room facility, St. Aloysius, was constructed and it housed the students for the following eleven years. By 1956, these buildings were reported as being in severe disrepair. During this time the schools in Lawn were operated under the jurisdiction of the local Roman Catholic parish.

Lawn residents were first introduced to school consolidation in 1956 when a decision was made by the parish priest to bus the high school students from Lawn over thirteen kilometers of dirt road to the neighboring community of St. Lawrence where they would attend a school operated by the Sisters of Mercy. High school students from Lawn continued schooling in St. Lawrence until 1961 at which time the parish priest decided that they should

return to their own community school. In 1962, two new schools opened in Lawn: St. Paul's Primary, a four room school housing K-6 students; and Holy Name of Mary, housing grades 4-11 students. All students from Lawn, as well as approximately thirty students from the nearby community of Roundabout attended school in these new buildings.

### **The Voice of Educational Authority: Singular and Dominant**

As was the case in Lawn and throughout the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Roman Catholic Church played a major role in shaping the structure and content of the education system. In 1956, the official school authority for the community of Lawn was the parish priest of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Father Michael Connolly, who had arrived to the parish in 1952. St. Thomas Aquinas Parish consisted of the communities of both Lawn and St. Lawrence. There is no official documentation available from either parish or board records for this period, so the reasons for the priests' decisions are relayed by community members who were resident at this time. At that time, the clergy were most often the individuals who made the educational decisions for the communities. One respondent remarked that "at the time the clergy were for all intents and purposes, the sole members of the school boards in the rural communities. As such, they had a major role and were the sole decision makers" (Pat, personal communication, September 15, 2001). This opinion is generally borne out in the literature of the time (Rowe, 1952, p.23).

Prior to the move in 1956, Lawn students were housed at St. Aloysius' School, a two classroom school with Grades 1-6 in one class and Grades 7-11 in the other class. The school was reported as being in poor physical condition with no indoor plumbing or electricity. The

decision to move the high school students to school in St. Lawrence was announced from the altar by the parish priest a few months before the students actually moved. According to community residents the clergy of the day felt that the school system in St. Lawrence provided a better educational facility for the Lawn students. The local priest also suggested that the Sisters of Mercy were more qualified to teach high school and that the multi-grade classrooms which existed in Lawn would convert to single graded classrooms in St. Lawrence.

Lawn residents corroborated this interpretation. "The priest felt that there were better facilities in St. Lawrence and that the Sisters of Mercy were better qualified to teach. Also, we would be in single grade classrooms instead of multi-grade classrooms" (Marc, personal communication, September 15, 2001). "There was a new school in St. Lawrence. Our school was a two classroom, Grades 1-6 and 7-11. The priest felt it was for the better in St. Lawrence. Single grade classes" (Tim, personal communication, September 16, 2001). Former students recall that "the school in St. Lawrence was like a palace compared to what we left. Ours had a pot belly stove and everyone was crammed into a two room school" (Tim, personal communication, September 16, 2001). Another respondent suggested that "it was more comfortable especially in winter than the one in Lawn. It was also roomier, apart from that there were no speciality rooms such as a music room or a gym in either location. There was a science lab of sorts in St. Lawrence but in my experience it was not used" (Pat, personal communication, September 16, 2001).

It appears, according to local opinion, that consolidating the Lawn high school students into the St. Lawrence system occurred because the local priest was acting in what

he felt to be in the best interests of the students from Lawn. There was no official record of any consultation with parents or community members in Lawn and community residents could not recall any consultation process.

### **The Voices of Lawn Residents: Publicly Silent**

In 1956, the residents of Lawn were predominantly Roman Catholic and embedded within their Catholic faith was a high regard for the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. My eighty year old mother recalls the year when the priest held Mass at our house every Tuesday during Lent:

The house was blessed but he blessed it again because the new piece was built on. The priest left the white cloth but he always took the chalice with him. When covered with the white cloth, the small table became the altar. Two candles, one on each side, were placed on the table and the priest put out the chalice when he came. The couch your father built was over on the end underneath the window. We had a bit of old canvas on the floor. You would have to scrub that because you couldn't have any dust in the room. All the crowd from Webbers would be there - and all the children - and ten or so from Roundabout would come. There wasn't many chairs so the ones could sit down did and everybody else stood around until it came time to kneel. The second last time he came I was in bed with the bad throat. He came in and blessed it and I was ever so long before I had another attack after that. Aunt Ann came up that time and did a few things before he came. (Kathleen, personal communication, October 6, 2001)

The responses from the community residents interviewed made it apparent that during this period the parish priest was viewed as a knowledgeable man, a spiritual advisor, and an authority figure. In interviews, local residents recall very little opposition to the proposed consolidation and suggest that most families took the clergy's word as final. Two respondents referred to the clergy's authority as being absolute. "Him and him alone called the shots. I

guess they [parents] felt that he was God and you couldn't speak back to him" (Tim, personal communication, September 15, 2001). "The priest being absolute ruler made the decisions and he did not make any discussion with the parents and most families took the clergy's authority as absolute" (Lillian, personal communication, September 15, 2001). As such, the parents of Lawn had no public voice on the issue. Their great respect and regard for the priest would not permit public disagreement with his decision. Yet as evidenced by the survey response from Lawn students who attended the St. Lawrence system in 1956, privately, both students and parents had many issues and concerns regarding consolidation. The survey data does not reveal that these concerns were ever addressed publicly to the local school authority, the priest. Nor did such information surface in the interviews.

All agreed that the St. Lawrence educational facilities were superior to those in Lawn, but other educational concerns were not alleviated by consolidation. In fact, other issues surfaced because of consolidation. These issues included the expense involved in acquiring food for 'lunch tins', the length of the school day, the loss of instructional time during winter months, the inadequate transportation system, as well as the bussing of children over treacherous road conditions.

The transfer of students occurred, regardless, and the reaction of students was mixed. One student recalls that, "I did not feel very good about it. Having to get up at six in the morning and take a lunch box with you wasn't very good. I know my father wasn't happy as he was working in the mines at the time. There were nine others to try to feed and clothe as my mother had died three years earlier" (Tim, personal communication, September 16, 2001). Another former student suggested that the difficulties included, "the terrible road

conditions in winter, loss of a lot of time, early hours and later in the evening" (Pat, personal communication, September 16, 2001). One individual stated that, "personally, I think it [going to St. Lawrence] made me a bit of a better person. I made life long friends and I learned a little tolerance for another community" (Marc, personal communication, September 16, 2001). One person summarized the experience in the following way:

At the time I went I hated going but I think that was because I had to board in St. Lawrence because Mom and Dad wouldn't let me go on the road the first winter. I stayed with a wonderful lady who was like a mother to me. The next year I got to go on the bus. We had good times and bad. We became very close with those we traveled on the bus with. Lots of funny stories. I remember one of the boys got out one day we were stuck in the snow with a spoon from his lunch tin to dig the road. We had to eat our lunch in the kindergarten classroom which was close to the bathrooms. I didn't like that. We made some good friends but a few ignorant people looked down on us because we didn't talk good like they did. We were always told that the people of St. Lawrence was paying for us to go to their school and we should be grateful. I think the clergy caused a lot of the bad feelings. I remember once I got a 'slapping' from a priest for getting 65 in a test. I really couldn't stand him after that. We missed out on all the extra curricular activities. It was three years I vowed that my children would not have to go through. (Lillian, personal communication, September 16, 2001)

Eventually, new meanings evolved from the St. Lawrence experience and by 1960 it seemed clear to residents of Lawn that the situation was not in the best interests of the Lawn students. While the high school students were housed in a modern facility in St. Lawrence, the K-8 students from Lawn continued to attend school in a dilapidated building in Lawn. High school students were losing instructional time due to road conditions in winter. There were no cafeteria facilities for the Lawn students in St. Lawrence and indications were that many students felt misplaced in the St. Lawrence system. Still, there were no strong public dissent from parental voices on the issue. However, voices were beginning to gather in an

undertone that was to become louder in the years that followed. At this point, there was only one powerful voice that was heard as the decision maker- that of the parish priest. His voice prevailed until 1960 when a new parish priest arrived, one with an equally powerful voice, but with a slightly different knowledge and understanding of the situation. It was when the new priest, Father Gregory Hogan, served as parish priest of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, that the high school students returned to Lawn to await the construction of two new school buildings which were opened in 1962.

#### **My Personal Story: A Child's Perspective**

Although I was the last of eleven children and not even born when the high school students of Lawn first moved to St. Lawrence, my life would become entwined within the story that began in 1956. My siblings attended school in both St. Lawrence and Lawn and their stories about schooling quickly placed me amidst the context of education during the late 1950's and early 1960's. At that time our family lived about two kilometers distant from Lawn in the small community of Webbers. My brothers and sisters attended St. Michael's School in Roundabout which was a one room Roman Catholic school built in 1929. It housed approximately thirty Grades 1-11 students from the communities of Roundabout and Webbers. It closed in 1962 at which time the students were bussed to the new school in Lawn.

The following reconstruction of a story of one room school life in Newfoundland in the 1950's is based on hours of listening to my brothers' and sisters' stories of attending school in Roundabout. The text that follows is a composite story of a typical school day in

winter beginning just after daybreak.

Gazing through the window of our small house Mother could see that today the ocean was calm and that the snow fall would be light. The house was warm now as Dad had lit the fire before he left the house to go to work. The ten children quickly got dressed as Mother prepared breakfast which consisted of oatmeal, toast, tea, and milk. The smell of the toast cooking on the wood stove gave a warmth to the kitchen as the children took their places on the long stool inside the wooden table. The rubber boots stood next to the hand-me-down coats, and the wool caps and mittens kept each child warm as they shuffled out into the morning air. The homemade book bags served the dual role of carrying books and lunch which consisted of, in the early years, homemade bread and molasses and, in the later years small tins of Libby's Beans. Outside, the children waited on the hill to meet their cousins and friends and together they walked the path over the Ridge to the Main Road which lead to Roundabout School. The walk took about twenty minutes and today the snow was not too deep, which was a good thing because today it was my brother's turn to light the fire at the school. He quickly gathered the splits and wood from behind the school where the men in the community had stacked it for the winter and soon the little school house was comfortably warm. The day began with morning prayers followed by the Butler Catechism, Arithmetic, Reading, and Geography. At lunchtime the teacher and the Roundabout children left the school to go home for lunch, but my brothers and sisters could stay at school and enjoy the ready supply of Coco Malt with their bread and molasses. By dismissal time the wind had picked up and the quiet snowfall had turned into blizzard conditions. For the children this was a happy moment because now Dad arrived at the school with the horse and sleigh to safely transport his children home. That night as they gathered around the table to do books, the air was filled with the excitement of the sleigh ride home. Having finished helping my sister with her Arithmetic, Dad called the little one over to read for him. My older sister began reading the final chapter of *Little Women* and with a sigh my brother began reading *Preston John*. (A composite story, reconstructed from memory, November, 2001)

Prior to the closure of St. Michael's School those of my brothers and sisters who attended school in Lawn recall cleaning floors, bringing wood, and feeling both excited and reserved about attending school there. The Lawn school was bigger and had more students and they recall being excited about meeting new people and about moving to Lawn. The fact

that the school's physical structure was in poor condition did not seem to be an issue, and coming from a one room school they were quite used to a multi-grade classroom. They recall that our parents' rules were: to go to school and do your books, to not cause trouble, and to not bring home any tales from school. After supper they sat at the kitchen table and did their homework without the aid of encyclopedias, dictionaries, and with limited adult help.

My sister related the evening routines:

After supper we had to sit at the kitchen table and do our books. You were not allowed to go out- not only by your parents but by the teachers. If a teacher saw you out after supper then you were in trouble at school the next day. We spent at least two hours every night at our homework. Dad could still help us with the math. (Mary, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

Despite this limited version of schooling, my sisters do not remember hearing any negative comments from my parents about the schools in either Lawn or St. Lawrence. Two of my sisters moved directly from the Roundabout school system to the St. Lawrence system. They recall being excited about attending a bigger school, about riding a bus instead of walking, and about attending a modern heated facility. Their only negative memories were associated with bad road conditions especially in winter time and about not being able to participate in school activities because they had to get the bus home.

Both my parents were strong advocates of "the importance of getting your education" and they trusted the knowledge of the parish priest. My parents acted in what they were told was in the best interests of their children. My mother recalls that:

Sending their children to school in Lawn and St. Lawrence gave them a chance for a better education. They would have better teachers and a better chance. We really didn't know which school was the best one for our children but we knew that we wanted them to have the best chance to get an education. The

priest said the bigger ones would go to school in St. Lawrence so they went.  
(Kathleen, personal communication, September 16, 2001)

If I were asked to describe my parents I would use words such as 'strong', 'determined', 'staunch'. My father viewed the world in black and white. To consider that his voice was silent on something as important as his children's education is almost inconceivable to me for although he was indeed a silent man, he held strong views on certain subjects and I would have thought education to be one of those subjects. He did not voice his opinion either to support or refute consolidation; these educational decisions were left to the parish priest. It would be years before my parents and my brothers and sisters would find not only a voice but a strong, staunch, and determined voice on the subject of education. Next time, the nature of their conviction would shift from fealty to religious authority to a strong belief in the value of community schooling.

### **Reflections and Ruminations**

As the history of schooling in Lawn unfolds, it becomes apparent that the dominant voice of the parish priest was the absolute authority on educational issues through 1956 to 1962. The power of the church was absolute. The consolidation decisions made were based on the priest's knowledge and understanding of education and the community that surrounded him. It seems that the priest's decisions were made in an attempt to provide the best possible educational opportunity for the high school children of Lawn. There was apparent agreement between priest and people regarding these educational decisions. Thus, these decisions were made and implemented.

Yet, it is evident that while the priest's voice was dominant, the agreement between priest and people was in many cases a superficial agreement for underlying these decisions were private voices with issues and concerns that were not being addressed. These parental voices were low and almost non-existent. Largely uneducated themselves, the parents trusted in their priest's decisions regarding the education of their children and, thus, they remained politically silent and left undiscussed many of their own issues and concerns. The parents' own knowledge of their strained financial resources, of dangerous road conditions, and of uncertainty about the move, were not part of the consolidation picture. There appeared to be no room in the decision making for these private voices. Why were the parents silent? As some respondents indicate, they were silent because they felt that the priest knew best. Many of them had little education and really didn't have the confidence to challenge the priest. It can be concluded from the interview transcripts that they felt that their issues, concerns, and arguments would have appeared small, unimportant, and insignificant compared to the much stronger and more knowledgeable authority of the parish priest.

One certainty that does exist is that although it is quite evident that the parents of Lawn held varying opinions on the consolidation movement, and shared these opinions in private, their views were publicly silent within the boundaries of their traditional Catholic way of life. Their issues were either not presented at all to the parish priest as arguments or they did not influence the decision making. There was no empirical evidence that the residents expressed their view in writing or in publicly recorded debate.

As I look back through this period in the community's history, I find it difficult to believe that the parents of Lawn could have been silent on what I feel must have been a very

important issue in their lives. It seems reasonable to assume that they must have faced quite a dilemma attempting to adhere to their Catholic tradition while silently debating their children's education. Embedded as they were in their strong Catholic roots and traditions, it was not in their nature or being to challenge the authority of the Church and so they acquiesced to the decisions of the local clergy.

However, in 1960, the new parish priest, Father Gregory Hogan arrived, and when the priest changed, as had been evidenced in the past, the educational policies also changed, for priests' voices that were indeed dominant and, sometimes, benevolent, were also singularly autonomous.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**DISSENTING VOICES GET LOUDER**  
**1962-1980**

This chapter traces a tumultuous period in the history of community schooling in Lawn, during which there were four separate efforts by various educational authorities in 1962, 1971, 1974 and again in 1978, to close the local school. This chapter gives an overview of the historical evolution of school governance during this time and reviews the particular situation in Lawn. The public voices of educational authorities are described and the angry response of the Lawn residents' is narrated. Finally, I tell my personal story from a student perspective and then ruminate and reflect on the eventful happenings of this era.

**Organizational Change in the Province's Education System**

Despite the fact that denominational education was embedded in the Terms of Union with Canada, the period between 1962 and 1980 witnessed the beginning of a gradual decline in the role of the Churches in education in Newfoundland. In 1964, the government appointed a Royal Commission on Education and Youth, (the Warren Commission) to examine the educational system in Newfoundland and to make recommendations for future development. Baker (1994) summarized the findings and impact of the Commission's recommendation:

The commission operated under the implicit assumptions of a denominational system, but quickly found that there was mounting public criticism of the system. In January 1967 its report attacked the denominational system, and proposed a reorganization of the Department of Education along functional

lines. The commission advocated an advisory role for the churches, leaving the Department to deal with instruction, administration and other services. Roman Catholics of the Commission disagreed and submitted a minority report, which was supported by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland. Negotiations ensued in an attempt to head off a major confrontation between Roman Catholic authorities and the government. A compromise was reached which saw the churches move out of the department, and the posts of departmental church superintendents were abolished. But the government agreed to legislation setting up two types of advisory committees: a denominational committee for each church, and a joint denominational committee to advise government. The churches through their committees retained control of their rights regarding school district boundaries, training and certification of teachers, and various other matters including religious education (p.106).

These recommendations were implemented and a major change occurred affecting the organization of school districts throughout the province.

By the mid - 1960s there were some 300 school boards in seven denominations. In keeping with the recommendations of the 1964 Royal Commission on Education and Youth, these were consolidated into 35 boards. The approximately 200 Protestant boards were reduced to 21 "integrated" boards, superseding the Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian and Salvation Army boards. The Pentecostal Assemblies and Seventh-day Adventist elected not to integrate, each maintaining one school board. The 100 Roman Catholic boards were consolidated into 12 (p.99).

Along with these recommendations, other changes were also impacting upon educational decision making within the province. Board members were appointed, the 1970 Education Act was amended to provide that at least one-third of board members be elected, while the 1984 Act was amended to allow at least two-thirds of members to be elected.

These changes in government policies, legislating elected representation from the general population to assist in governing the school districts concurred with changes that were taking place in the Roman Catholic Church. Post Vatican II documents were concurrently initiating a new focus on the 'priesthood of the laity', that is, the ordinary lay

person was being encouraged to take a more responsible decision making role within their parishes and in the church in general. Pastors were being encouraged to develop parish councils to involve laity in parish administration. It is within this political and religious context that the Lawn story continued to unfold.

### **Lawn and its Landscape ( 1962 - 1980)**

In the fall of 1962, the students of Lawn began to attend school in two newly constructed buildings in their own community. Community residents attribute the construction of the new schools to the work of the new parish priest, Father Gregory Hogan who had arrived in the local parish in 1960. One respondent remarked: "It was Father Hogan who decided to build the school in Lawn. The road conditions were poor and the old K-8 school was in bad condition, too. The parish priest was the moving force behind the building of the new school" (Pat, personal communication, September 16, 2001). Local residents recall that the money to build the schools came from a combination of government grants and parish money. One respondent stated that "the elementary and high buildings were separated from each other by [a distance of] one foot. The reasons for doing this was to gain access to two separate government grants-one grant for high school construction and one for elementary school construction" (Pat, personal communication, September 16, 2001).

Students moved into these new buildings in September of 1962 and school consolidation, for Lawn, was a relatively quiet issue for approximately ten years. During this period an educational partnership developed between students, teachers, and parents in the community of Lawn and on the political scene, new school boards were being organized

and in 1969, the school in Lawn came to be governed by the newly formed Roman Catholic School board for the Burin Peninsula. By 1971, promoted by local clergy and the new School Board, an attempt was once again made to consolidate the Lawn and St. Lawrence schools in St. Lawrence. The Roman Catholic School Board office was located in Marystown and two of the fifteen members or thirteen percent were representatives from Lawn while another two members represented the community of St. Lawrence. Parish priests representing the various communities around the Peninsula comprised thirty-three percent of the board membership while another thirty-three percent of the membership were representative of the Marystown area. The other eight percent membership consisted of representatives from the Rushoon area of the Burin Peninsula. Attempted consolidation was rejected outright by the community of Lawn. The students did not transfer to another school yet the issue was still unresolved. By 1974 the Lawn people discovered the board's plan to transfer the Lawn students into the newly constructed Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE) school in St. Lawrence. This school opened in 1976 amid much speculation surrounding the planned transfer of Lawn students into the DREE school. School Board records and interview data indicate that the DREE school in St. Lawrence was built based on enrolment projections from both Lawn and St. Lawrence - but without consultation with the Lawn people. The official attempt to consolidate did not occur until 1978 at which time the School Board once again faced opposition from the Lawn residents.

### **Voices of Educational Authority: Church and School Board**

Based on educational changes that were initiated by both government legislation and the documents of Post Vatican II, the period between 1962 and 1980 witnessed the beginnings of a transition in educational authority from the singular dominant voice of the priest to the dual authority of both priest and lay people within the structure of school board, consisting of both elected and appointed members.

The Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula, the governing authority for the schools in Lawn and St. Lawrence, was established in 1969 and perhaps one of the biggest challenges to this new board came from what was referenced as 'the Lawn situation'. Official school board minutes of meetings began to be published and were a principal source of data collection for this thesis. As well, a significant federal event occurred in that same year which would ultimately impact upon local school board decisions regarding school consolidation for Lawn - the Canadian Government created the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE). Under this new federal ministry, incentives were to be offered for industrial developments by means of initial cash grants to entrepreneurs to locate, expand or modernize operations in designated high unemployment areas; "growth centers" were designated in various categories of "special areas" to receive financial assistance for infrastructure.

At a meeting of the Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula on July 17, 1970, two important issues pertaining to the Lawn school system were discussed. First, the Building Committee postponed the much needed repairs to the Lawn high school; and second, plans were being prepared to apply for DREE funding for a new central high school

for St. Lawrence. Lawn and St. Lawrence also had a change of parish priest, Father Philip Lewis, who arrived in 1968.

Father Lewis wished to have approval for plans for the proposed extension to the elementary school in St. Lawrence. The motion was carried and \$40,000 was approved for the project. At the same meeting, there was some discussion of the Lawn extension and the necessity of rectifying the hazardous state of the overhead furnaces in the Lawn elementary and high schools. Father Lewis suggested that this matter be deferred until a start is made on the St. Lawrence project when more time can be devoted to a thorough analysis of the Lawn situation. (Board Minutes, July 17, 1970)

When renovation decisions were made, the high school at Lawn was not included in the proposed plan.

Father Lewis proposed that the elementary and high school in Lawn be separate and instead of an addition to the high school, an addition of three classrooms plus library and teachers' room be made to the elementary. He presented tentative plans but did not wish any decision made at the moment. (Board Minutes, September 3, 1970)

Plans for a new DREE school for St. Lawrence were under way. "It was reported by Father Wallis, Board Chairman, that Christopher Barlow would be drawing preliminary plans for this school" (Board Minutes, September 28, 1970)

At a Board meeting on October 19, 1970, "Father Lewis reported that the engineer's survey should be ready in a few days, after which Sir Christopher will be able to begin preliminaries. He also stated that the people of Lawn are beginning to change their attitude about sending their children to St. Lawrence" (Board Minutes, October 19, 1970). Such is the first reference in the school board minutes to Lawn students moving to St. Lawrence. Interview data with Lawn residents did not indicate support for Father Lewis' view that Lawn people were changing their attitudes about sending their children to St. Lawrence.

By June 3, 1971, the Board held a Special Meeting to discuss the Lawn school system.

At this meeting three of the main issues discussed were: accommodations, viability, and consolidation.

Father Lewis outlined the problem of accommodations which exists at Lawn. There are twelve classrooms in Lawn at present, with a need for fourteen. There is no money available for an extension and the advisability of extension is questionable anyway. Considering new trends, a high school of 140-150 students would not constitute a viable unit. (Board Minutes, June 3, 1971)

A discussion regarding alternatives to the accommodation problem continued culminating with a decision that the grades nine, ten, and eleven students would be moved to St. Lawrence. The remaining pupils at Lawn would be broken down into primary, elementary, and junior high divisions.

This decision was favored for the overall educational improvement of the children of Lawn. Father Lewis moved that the board decide to bring the grades nine, ten, and eleven students from Lawn to the St. Lawrence high school for the year 1971-72. Mr. Mike Haley [Lawn representative] seconded the motion. Mr. Dober, Board Superintendent, explained that with this agreement the number of teachers would be reduced to the extent that too many teachers have already been hired for next year. There was some discussion as to how to deal with this situation after which Father Lewis' motion was voted on and carried. (Board Minutes, June 3, 1971)

Teacher allocation, cafeteria facilities, and bus transportation were problems which were discussed in detail. When interviewed for this thesis research, Haley indicated that he supported the move as a temporary measure until further improvements could be made to the Lawn school system. "At the time in Lawn we needed more classroom space. I supported the move as a temporary measure only. We needed improvements in the physical structure at Lawn" (Personal Interview, September 16, 2001).

Mr. Pickett [Marystown representative] felt that there would be no difficulty

in making a decision, but he wondered about the attitude of the people and the problems which might arise in trying to convince them that the actions of the Board would be to their advantage. (Board Minutes, June 3, 1971)

Mr. Pickett's concern possibly indicates the intensity of the situation by June, 1971. It was decided that the people of Lawn would be informed of the Board's decision through a circular letter rather than a public meeting.

This consolidation decision was made independent of both the Department of Education and the Denominational Education Council, the joint denominational governing committee for the province. By June 10, 1971 indications were that both organizations might not support the School Board decision.

It was felt that our Board may not get the support of the DEC or the Department of Education in the transfer of the high school pupils from Lawn to St. Lawrence. Possible political overtones were discussed, but members felt that as our decision was made in the interest of better educational facilities for the children of Lawn and apart from financial considerations, then the Board should not be governed by outside influences. (Board Minutes, June 10, 1971)

Lawn residents still had not yet received the notification letter of school closure.

Mr. Dober stated a number of reasons why our circular letter to the parents at Lawn was withheld. He also pointed out potential problems with teacher contracts if teachers refuse to move to St. Lawrence. Father Lewis reported that in conversation with Mr. Alex Hickman the whole situation was discussed. Father Lewis felt that in considering the benefits for all children there is no other choice but to move the high school to St. Lawrence. Our letter is to be sent to the parents at the end of this week. (Board Minutes, June 10, 1971)

According to school board officials, there would be no high school in Lawn as of September 1971-72. However, these plans failed to materialize because Lawn residents protested and refused to allow their children to move into the St. Lawrence system. The

conflict further developed between board and people in the mid to late seventies as further attempts at consolidation were made by the board but rejected by the people. The consolidation drama that unfolded in Lawn in 1980, between the Lawn residents and the school board, was rooted in the unrest of the previous decade.

#### **Voices of Lawn Residents: Mounting Dissension Within the Community**

When the news of the decision to close the Lawn high school in September, 1971, finally reached parents, the reaction was swift and defiant. A primary reason for their outright rejection of the proposal was the road conditions. The Lawn miners who worked at Alcan Florspar Mines in St. Lawrence and traveled the treacherous thirteen kilometer stretch on a daily basis vowed that their children would not be traveling on those roads. One man stated, "It was bad enough that we had to be on the hills in the winter time. We were not going to put our youngsters through that" (Wayne personal communication, September 16, 2001). A former miner recalls the winter road conditions between Lawn and St. Lawrence.

When we worked in Salt Cove Brook in St. Lawrence, we used to have to drive a distance of about eight mile[s] over dirt road. In the winter time it wasn't very good. I remember one winter me and me brother went on shift that morning 8 o'clock and we came off 4 o'clock for to try to get home. The weather was bad and I advised him that we should stay in Salt Cove Brook 'cause if we gets up on the road we could get stuck. And he said to me, "Nah, that's all right, we can go on". So that was 4 o'clock in the morning that we came off. We came up and we went through a good many heaps of snow. It was getting worse all the way along and the last one we ran into we stuck her in a snowbank. We had to get out and we were there for about an hour trying to dig her out. By the time we got her dug out we were drowned wet cause you were always wet when you comes out from underground. We lifted her around and pushed her around and by that time it was about 5:30 and we were going to head back to St. Lawrence. Now getting back what we were after coming over was the problem. So we went through a few heaps of snow and when the next one came we got her stuck again. We were there

for about an hour trying to get out of that. By this time we were good and hungry and not very many of us had any cigarettes left. We headed back to Salt Cove Brook for the dry house. We got in there and we got our clothes dried up to a certain extent. The other shift came on and we had to wait for them to go underground so we could get a place to lie down. When all that was cleared away, we headed back up again. Oh, I don't know; we were probably an hour and half or two hours in the dry house. We tried to head her back again. Now we had nothing to eat from about 6:30 that evening. We were on the road you could say the whole three parts of that day. We headed up again and we got as far as Three Stick Ridge and we got stuck again. I don't know what time it was when we got home. It must have been 1 o'clock or later. We had to go back again that evening for the 8 o'clock shift and it was the same thing all over again. Although the road wasn't quite as bad but it was drifting mad - you couldn't see your hand before you in a lot of places. We were about an hour late for shift. We worked all night and we left to go home for that day. We were coming along pretty good till we got up to Three Stick Ridge and we got stuck again. We were there until about seven or eight o'clock. That was what we had to face every winter. You didn't know when you were going to get back or how long you were going to be on the road. (Howard: Personal Interview, November 19, 2001)

Within a week, a delegation of parents from Lawn led by Mr. Walter Edwards, attended a Board meeting on July 19, 1971, to present counter arguments to the proposed consolidation plan. The people of Lawn were not convinced of the validity of the Board's decision. They wondered why the Board was "unwilling to cooperate with the people of Lawn and help them" (Board Minutes, July 19, 1971). In a lengthy discussion Board members considered deferring the decision, rescinding the motion, and issuing a private ballot for Lawn residents. In the end, Mr. Tuff, Lawn representative, "moved that in view of the circumstances prevailing and the inadvisability of implementing the Board's plans for this year, the Board rescind its decision for this year" (Board Minutes, July 19, 1971). The motion was carried. By July 27, 1971, plans were underway for "tenders to be called for the installation of plumbing and necessary renovations in the school at Lawn" (Board Minutes,

July 19, 1971). These renovations included a Board decision to subdivide the school gym to provide needed instructional space and to keep all Lawn students, K-11, in the community.

All should have progressed well at this point, but the Board's decision to partition the gym to allow for two additional classrooms was not acceptable to community residents. The gym, which had been built by "free labor" from community residents, was also used as a parish hall. On August 31, 1971, parents, students, and community residents, led by the newly formed Lawn Citizens Committee, stopped renovations at the Lawn school by setting up a picket line outside the school.

The main point of contention was the decision of the Building Committee to partition the school auditorium to allow for two additional classrooms. The meeting was reminded that this partitioning had been agreed to by the parents of Lawn at an earlier meeting. It was agreed that immediate action must be taken with regard to the present situation at Lawn. A motion was made by Father Lewis and seconded by Mr. Pickett that the Board take immediate steps to implement its decision regarding renovations of the school building in Lawn. Motion was carried unanimously. The Chairman of the Lawn Citizens Committee was informed of the Board's decision by telephone and was asked for his cooperation. He expressed the opinion that the Committee would not cooperate. The meeting resolved that nothing must interfere with the completion of the renovations. (Board Minutes, August 31, 1971)

The Lawn residents were adamant that another solution, other than losing the school gym and the parish hall, could be found. They consequently continued their objections to the Board, and continued to picket the school, and to keep their children home. As the battle continued to build, the RCMP were called to the situation and Board members unanimously voted to have charges laid against any individual who interfered with the renovations.

In an attempt to implement the Board's decision, the RCMP were requested to clear the school grounds on September 1. After studying the situation, the RCMP advised that although the grounds could be cleared of those picketing, and workers escorted into the building if necessary, they felt that this would

not be a permanent solution to the problem. The Chairman stated that the reason for this Special Meeting was to consider a possible alternative to the classroom shortage. (Board Minutes, September 10, 1971)

When the school board made the decision, the priest was seen to be central in the conflict. One resident recalls memories of the picket line. "I remember one day that the parents were picketing the school and the priest came. He was driving a big Chrysler. I don't remember the exact confrontation but I remember that when he was backing out of the driveway his car hooked into one of the picket signs. He went around the turn with the picket sign towing behind him" (Patrick, personal communication, September 26, 2001). In an earlier interview, another person remembered the priest's anger. "I remember that when he walked through the crowds he was kicking the picket signs out of his way. He wasn't very happy with us" (Jerry, personal interview, September 16, 2001). The conflict continued for ten days until eventually it was decided that two classrooms could be constructed on the stage area of the school auditorium instead of on the main floor. The two members from Lawn did not attend this meeting.

Disappointment was voiced that Board members representing Lawn were not present at the meeting. Mr. Haley [Lawn representative] had informed the Business Office that he would be present and a message had been delivered to Mr. Tuff informing him of the meeting. A decision was made that the chairman, after confirming that the members had been notified of the meeting, write both expressing the Board's grave disappointment with their action and requesting an explanation for their absence from the meeting. (Board Minutes, September 10, 1971)

The two classrooms were constructed and these were used for the 1971-72 school year. In the following year the Board agreed that an extension was needed to the Lawn school.

The parents of Lawn were pleased with the renovations that had taken place. The school was starting to build a reputation as an effective school. Morale was good, a core academic curriculum was offered, team sports were organized, youth groups were formed and for community residents there was a sense of pride and accomplishment in the school's successes.

Let me tell you by 1970 our school had built a reputation whereas in the 1956 move parents sent their children to St. Lawrence to get a good education. By the 70's they were certain that their children were getting a good education in Lawn. Also, people of the 70s were better educated. Some of them had completed Grade 11 and the ones that didn't were still better educated than their parents. Let's face it, in the 50's a lot of people couldn't read or write. The other thing too was that many of these parents had gone to school in St. Lawrence and they did not want that for their children. (Patrick: Personal Interview, September 26, 2001)

As these circumstances were occurring in Lawn, the St. Lawrence Standing Committee formed for the purpose of obtaining a DREE school for the area, was awaiting word from Ottawa on a final decision regarding the construction of a new school. Board members were informed that the Honorable Donald Jamieson, the Member of Parliament for the region, would like to see Lawn students included in the planned DREE school, "The meeting was informed that the Honorable Donald Jamieson favored the inclusion of Lawn in this plan. He had expressed the opinion that if the high school students from Lawn would have to be bussed to and from St. Lawrence, [it] would be a good argument for the paving of the road from St. Lawrence to Lawn also" (Board Minutes, February 21, 1972).

I recently relayed that information to a community resident whose response even today was very direct. "I can assure you that the people of Lawn did not know that Don Jamieson suggested that their children go to school in St. Lawrence. We voted for him for

years. I can assure you that I wouldn't have voted for him if I had known that" (Patrick: Personal Interview , September 26, 2001).

By 1973, Lawn had another parish priest, Father Edward Fitzgerald. At a School Board meeting on September 17, 1973, "it was moved by Father Fitzgerald, and seconded by Father Walsh that plans for the new DREE school for St. Lawrence be approved. Motion carried" (Board minutes, September 17, 1973). However, the school board did not give official notice to the parents of Lawn students that their children were included in the numbers for the DREE high school in St. Lawrence and it was through a public relations publication from the local mining company operating out of St. Lawrence, that parents made this discovery. The following discussion from School Board minutes outlines the event:

Before the meeting adjourned, Father Fitzgerald, who was somewhat disturbed concerning a news release to the "Alcan News" re the new DREE school for the St. Lawrence system, asked Mr. Dober why the information was given to this source especially at this time when neither the people nor the teachers of Lawn had any information prior to this announcement and before the final plans had been approved. Father Fitzgerald said that he was most concerned that the article stated that the school will handle the children in the St. Lawrence and Lawn areas and that he is now personally faced with having to deal with the people from the Lawn area who bitterly oppose having their children attend this school. He said that he had discussed the situation before with the Superintendent and said that the situation has to be handled very carefully. In spite of this, the release was given without any consultation with the St. Lawrence Committee. He said that there is a delegation from Lawn now going to meet representatives of DREE, the Department of Education and the Premier. Mr. Dober responded that the Public Relations man from Alcan had telephoned him requesting the information concerning the new DREE school. He wrote Mr. Elliott, giving him the necessary information, but did not tell him that the children from Lawn would be attending this school. (Board Minutes, March 19, 1974)

Three years later in 1977, the Board Minutes referenced the original application to DREE.

Father Walsh inquired as to whether or not any decision will be made on moving the Lawn students to St. Lawrence. Father suggested that some pressure could come from some areas of the fact that we are maintaining empty classrooms in St. Lawrence, and at the same time operating a high school in Lawn. Mr. Chairman stated that he personally will not approach the people of Lawn. Father Whitty commented that the question has already been discussed. Father Walsh pointed out that this was agreed to in the original negotiations with DREE for the new school and DEC [the provincial Denominational Education Council] is considering the question. (Board Minutes, June 24, 77)

Although Lawn residents suspected that the DREE application included student enrollment from Lawn, to this day, many are not aware that their suspicions were grounded in fact. The new DREE school opened in St. Lawrence in September 1976 but Lawn students did not move into the school. While there was much discussion within the community, the issue did not resurface publicly until 1978.

By this time the school in Lawn had established a reputation as a good school with high achievement in both curricular and co-curricular activities. Staff and parents had developed a good working relationship, and the school had become an integral part of the community. The people of Lawn had a strong voice on the Board in the voice of their representative Mr. Mike Haley, who by 1978 had been elected Board Chairman.

In 1978, financial cutbacks in provincial funding forced the Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula to develop a plan to eliminate five teaching units. In consultation with principals throughout the district, the professional staff at the Board prepared two options for proposed lay-offs, one of which required the closure of the high school in Lawn and the second allowed the school to remain open but with a reduced teaching staff. At a Board meeting on March 21, 1978, the professional staff of the school board

presented the two options for proposed layoffs. Father Kevin Molloy, newly appointed priest to the parish, made a comment at this meeting that, initially, seemed to oppose the Lawn closure and supported Lawn retaining its school system.

Father K. Molloy stated that consideration must be given to the high academic standard in Lawn as compared to St. Lawrence, and therefore it would be regressive to move Lawn students to St. Lawrence even though the physical plant in St. Lawrence is far ahead of the Lawn plant. Father also related examples where students are being returned to smaller schools in their own communities. (School Board Minutes, March 21, 1978)

Haley, the Board Chair who was apparently unaware of the proposal, requested that Mr. M. Pickett, First Vice-Chairman, take over the Chair, as Haley had some remarks to make that would not be impartial and he did not want to make them from the chair. His remarks are detailed in the Board Minutes:

Mr. M. Haley inquired as to when the recommendations came up, as there had been no consultation with the Chairman or any members of the Board. Also, are the proposals tabled to create a panic situation so that the Board will have to decide on the proposed lay-offs immediately since the deadline for lay-offs is on Thursday, March 30, 1978. Mr. Haley stated that the proposals are not along the lines of discussions that took place with the principals of Lawn and St. Lawrence. Mr. Haley asked when the plans for the proposal started and was the Chairman not considered trustworthy enough to be consulted on the considerations being given by the professional staff. He also expressed concern that the Staffing Committee was not involved in formulating the recommendations. He stated that the possibilities of cut-backs were known to the Board as far back as six months, however, it is strange that the recommendations did not come forth until now (Board Minutes, March 21, 1978).

The Superintendent stated that no one expected the cut-backs to be implemented, and the official announcement was not made until February 20, 1978. The Superintendent stated that the proposals are made on the basis of a District review, and if we get into smaller schools the difficulty in retaining the number of units required is even greater than in larger schools. This creates a problem in trying to maintain a broader programme in a high school where enrollments are low. As this relates to Lawn, the enrollment in the

school calls for three teaching units, (for high school) whereas they have five. Therefore, professionally, the consolidation of Lawn and St. Lawrence High schools would result in two lay-offs and the students of both Lawn and St. Lawrence High schools would be offered a broader program. The high school teachers in Lawn could be offered positions in St. Lawrence High school. He also stated that the final recommendations were not revealed to anyone until the Board considered them and made a decision on what ever recommendation it feels should be implemented. (Board Minutes, March 21, 1978)

Haley moved "that the Board accept Option II of the proposal by the professional staff. Father D. Walsh suggested that the proposed recommendations be taken to the people of Lawn for their views" (Board Minutes, March 21, 1978). Option II would see the Lawn school remain open but with a reduction of teaching units. Option II was accepted and the Lawn school remained open for another school year, 1979-1980. It seemed clear that the voice of the Chair, who was the representative from Lawn, was a significant influence in that decision.

The residents of Lawn were determined that they would not lose their community school and continued to organize their efforts to ward off any future efforts on school closure. Approximately ninety-five percent of the community supported the collective voice of the newly formed Lawn Concerned Parents Committee in their efforts to fight both priest and school board to retain community schooling.

The battle became particularly heated between the parish priest and community residents. Antagonism developed among community members. Between 1979 and 1980, the priest, Father Molloy, changed his initial position and came to support the move to St. Lawrence, suggesting that the grades seven to eleven students would receive a better education there. At a Holy Name Society meeting in Lawn on January 27, 1980, he stated

that “the responsibility of education falls primarily with parents. Our greatest concern should be to obtain the best possible education for our children”(Holy Name Society Minutes: January 27, 1980). The Minutes further suggest that,

It was clearly stated by Father Molloy that in his opinion the children would receive a better education by attending school at St. Lawrence. Availability of subjects taught for smaller schools, more facilities, home economics, library, better gym, all being part of Father’s argument. William Lockyer [Chairman of the Concerned Parents Committee] reports that a Committee of Concerned Parents has been formed and will be seeking a meeting with the School Board immediately. (Holy Name Society Minutes: January 27, 1980)

Several families within the community supported the parish priest’s opinion regarding consolidation. Unfortunately, these families were to become victims of some of the anger and hostility toward school closure.

#### **A Personal Voice: A Student's Perspective**

In the early 1970’s, I was a student at Holy Name of Mary and when I reflect on school closure issues, I recall the emotional upset of community residents and students as they resisted school consolidation pressures from both priest and school board. All other aspects of life seemed to be on hold while people struggled to retain their community school. The voices were very strong in their opinion of school and the effects that its closure would have on the community of Lawn. These people did not believe that their children would receive a better education in St. Lawrence. In fact, they felt that their children would suffer a loss if the move occurred.

The school was a place where the community gathers. It was a place of pride. Sure, I can remember when we were in school we use to wash down the

classrooms and we would always stay after school to decorate the class or to make sure that all the books were tidy on the shelf. Remember we use to have extra math classes on Saturday and Sunday for anyone who needed help. And even now sure when the soccer teams win we have a celebration. The whole harbor goes to the Christmas concerts and the graduation is a family event. Each graduate is allowed to bring eight or ten people from their family. I know in other places the parents are not even allowed to go to the graduation. The dinner is only for the graduate and their guest. The whole community gathers for our graduation. Sure we would have missed out on all of that if they had moved the school. (Cary: Personal Interview, November 19, 2001)

They were fighting for not only a school and all that a school entails but they were also fighting for community identity which had been so very much associated with the school. This story from my personal journal, July, 1999, reflects on the close relationship that existed between the school, the church, and the community.

“Oh Mary We Crown Thee With Blossoms Today, Queen of the Angels, Queen of the May” The practices had been ongoing for weeks but now it was Sunday morning: the day of The Crowning of Mary and The Blessing of the Fleet in the Community of Lawn. Standing quietly in the march line in the school gym on this beautiful May morning was a difficult task, but the instructions were clear, and we were not to move until the singing cued the beginning of the march from the school to the church for the Crowning, and then onwards to the Jersey Room for the Blessing of the Fleet. So standing in our best dresses, we tried not to watch the white shirted boys who mischievously demanded our attention. Another “Shh! Shh!” from the teacher and the marvelous event began. The procession was led by the priest and altar boys followed by four young girls dressed in long flowing pastel colored gowns and carrying the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The senior girl, wearing a white bridal gown and holding the crown of flowers followed behind Mary. The voices of practically the entire school could be heard by the community who had gathered in the church and were waiting in anticipation for the arrival of the procession. Amidst proud parents and hymns of praise, we arrived at the church and Mary was carefully placed in front of the altar and reverently adorned with an array of spring flowers. The mood was joyous as we left the church and marched toward the ocean and the fishermen who were eagerly waiting in their boats. Young and old gathered on the wharf as both priest and community prayed for a bountiful and safe fishing season. For us children, the excitement heightened with the invitation to go for a boat ride

or sometimes a boat race in through the Harbor. Everyone smiled, even the skippers, for it was a special day in our community. (Personal journal, July, 1999)

In addition, the children had become very successful within the school system. Prevalent within the community was a sense of the importance of education. It had existed in the late 1950's and had been the chief reason that people stated for permitting their children to move to St. Lawrence - to get a better education. It was still a prevalent attitude in the late 1970's but this time people felt that the better education would occur within their own community.

As a student, I do not ever remember feeling that I was receiving an inferior education because I was in a small school. In fact, the feelings were quite opposite because as students we felt a great sense of pride in the school. We had a good relationship with our teachers and principal and we worked after school and on weekends to improve school life. My personal journal describes how involved students were in the school:

The painting had already begun when my friends and I arrived at the school. The place was abuzz with students dressed in torn jeans and tattered shirts, and armed with paint brushes. The dreary school corridors would be transformed into 'works of art' or at least 'labors of love' by the end of the weekend. As the sounds of the Moody Blues and the Rolling Stones, filled the school hallways, we happily began painting in our assigned areas. Once in a while we would get a little distracted from the task at hand and create decorative flowers or symbols of peace underneath the final coat of paint. Although we were content to be painting the school on a Friday night, we were after all, just teenagers anxious to leave our marks on the halls of our school. Before we left to walk home that night, we all sat around in the gym munching on chips, drinking Coke, and boasting about our painting skills. (A story recorded in my personal journal, July, 1999)

Students installed a public address system, painted walls, built shelves, and fund raised for

books, sports equipment, and school uniforms. Our school participated in all sports, regionally and provincially and offered students access to youth groups such as Allied Youth, Cadets, Student Council, Children of Mary, and Cheerleaders. We did not rush home after school because we were quite content to stay after school and to help organize, plan, and fund raise for school activities.

Perhaps one of my fondest memories associated with school life occurred on a beautiful snowy Christmas Eve in 1973. Mr. Siscoe, our school principal, and a group of students had been working on a special project that was to be revealed on Christmas Eve. As the community gathered for the traditional Midnight Mass at the old church just across the road from our school, parishioners were greeted by the vision of a beautifully constructed Nativity scene complete with Christmas hymns filling the night air. In 1973, in the rural community of Lawn, the image was indeed a spectacular sight! (A story recorded in my personal journal, August, 1999)

Reflecting on school life in Lawn in the 1970s, I now realize that we were establishing traditions - we were helping to create a school. These sports teams and youth groups had not been a prevalent part of school prior to 1970. Now, these were organizations that the students, teachers, and parents were creating. The organizations were successful, and they were a reflection of our combined efforts and hard work, and more importantly they were ours. There was a sense of ownership - from the paint that was put on the hallways, to the uniforms that were worn by the school teams - and it was a deeply rooted community ownership. These and other events linked the school with the community. The school was an extension of home and the home was an extension of school - we felt part of it - there was a sense of belonging, we had responsibilities, and we were expected to do our part to contribute to its success.

### **Reflections and Ruminations**

The events of this period in Lawn's educational history were significant and reveal a pattern of authoritative challenge and associated community response. As the challenges mounted and became more threatening, the voices of the residents of Lawn grew louder, stronger and more effectively organized. As a result, school board authorities were forced to resort to a pattern of decision and rescission. The conflict became more intense and the interplay between competing voices became more tumultuous and tense.

Just one month after making the decision to close the Lawn high school for the 1971-72 school year, the School Board voted to rescind the decision. It is difficult to judge whether the decision to rescind occurred because the School Board felt that the Department of Education and the Catholic Education Council might not support the transfer of Lawn students to St. Lawrence, because the community of Lawn protested the decision, or because of a combination of both circumstances. In any case, the Lawn school remained open in the 1971-72 school year.

Following public protest in August, 1971, the School Board once again changed its decision regarding the addition of two classrooms to the school gym. The local residents challenged the School Board's views on the position of the two additional classrooms, citing that the gym was not a good location because it not only served the school's physical education needs, but that it also served the community as a parish hall.

The voices of the parents were growing, getting louder, and becoming more challenging to educational authorities, as well as becoming more formalized through the voice of the Lawn representative on the Roman Catholic Burin Peninsula School Board and through

newly organized parent groups such as the Lawn Concerned Parents Committee. The ordinary Lawn citizen appeared to become more confident and more articulate in school decisions concerning their children. They were assuming a personal authority that they did not display during the 1956 consolidation move.

The continued struggle with consolidation, the continued rescission of Board decisions, and the continued deterioration of the school's physical plant all combined to create a growing dissatisfaction among the people regarding School Board decisions for Lawn. The conflict intensified when parents discovered, not through democratic process, but through a company newsletter that was sent out to employees, that the new DREE school in St. Lawrence would "handle the children in the St. Lawrence and Lawn areas". This affront by the school board was heightened by the response of the local church authorities because the parish priest felt too, that the students of Lawn would have the best possible opportunity for a good education in the St. Lawrence system.

Lawn parents felt that they were protecting their children's best interests and their decisions were made from that perspective. It appears that both the School Board and the parish priest were operating out of a belief system that appeared to be well-intentioned and considered the best educational opportunity for children. However, these decisions were district-focused and non-consultative and were made outside the parameters of the parents' belief system regarding the education of their children. The authoritative decisions of the School Board, including clerical representation, conflicted sharply with the increasingly strong voice of the people. These parents not only held strong views on school consolidation, but they also gave voice to their views empowered by their own organizational

structures. The days of silently accepting the decisions of external authority had disappeared. The parents struggled to be heard and together their voices became a moving force behind the Lawn school system. Power relations were shifting.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT**

**1980**

This chapter narrates a critical moment in the unfolding of the Lawn school story because changing political and religious conditions created opportunities for ordinary citizens to express their views and wield some influence within traditional authority structures. This chapter will review the provincial political scene early in this decade, examine the situation in Lawn as a reflection of this larger picture, describe the determination of the school board to consolidate schools on the Burin Peninsula, and narrate the residents' angry resistance to such change. It will also present my personal perspective as a parent and conclude with some reflections on this most significant year in the fight to save a small school.

**Rural Schools in the Newfoundland Education System in the 1980's**

As educational policy continued to develop in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, both educators and politicians began to focus attention on the vast number of small schools in rural Newfoundland, seeking ways to make the educational system more effective and efficient. While this chapter focuses on events in Lawn in 1980, the political context about the nature of small schools and their place in provincial schooling at the time was articulated a little further into the decade in reports generated by House (1986) and Riggs (1987).

In his economic report, *Building On Our Strengths: Report of the Royal*

*Commission on Employment and Unemployment*, Dr. Douglas House (1986), stated that:

The Commission is fully committed to the ideals of universal education. Education should prepare people not just for life in an outport, but for life in a city, in other parts of Canada and indeed the world. Nevertheless, education must begin with the child in his or her own setting, in an environment that is familiar. In Newfoundland outports, this setting is typically one where fishing is the main industry, men build and repair their own houses and boats, women work as homemakers and as seasonal fish plant or service-sector workers and people of all ages spend much time in household production. The school programme should include more courses of a practical, applied nature which are geared to rural lifestyles and which can contribute directly to improving young people's self-reliance within their own communities. (p.314)

In April, 1986, The Honorable Loyola Hearn, Minister of Education announced a Small Schools Study Project. Its stated purpose was to develop proposals to enhance educational opportunities in small schools. Dr. Frank Riggs, a member of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, was Project Director and the Report of the Small Schools Study Project was completed in January 1987. Riggs (1987) reported:

Despite the present high cost of education, this Report includes recommendations that additional funding be made available to support programs in small schools. The present level of funding has not enabled small schools to develop and maintain an acceptable standard of program support and consequently we feel that additional funding is necessary. The recommendations in that area are based on grades and programs rather than on pupil enrolment. Our position is that the school programs must be the focus since the school must offer these programs for each grade independent of the grade enrolment. (p. 61)

Riggs further stated that:

Finally, we have made recommendations regarding school consolidation and co-operation among religious denominations. It is important to understand that these recommendations are not attempts to discredit small schools, but rather an attempt to offer what we believe to be an opportunity for pupils to study a more varied program than is presently possible in small schools without diminishing the social and moral development which has been

characteristic of Newfoundland education. For schools which must exist because of isolation we have made as bold and as liberal recommendations as we think possible. However, we believe it would be irresponsible to recommend that small schools in or near communities with larger schools should also qualify for special considerations. An alternative exists. That alternative may require students to walk across the road or to be transported a short distance to a larger school. (p. 61)

In an article entitled "Small Schools: The Overlooked Universe of Elementary Schooling in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador", John Sutherland (1989), President of the Notre Dame Branch of the Newfoundland Teachers' Association discussed the Small Schools Study Project Report. Sutherland noted that most recommendations were not implemented three years after the study.

The seven-member Advisory Panel was charged with the task of conducting an "investigation into the problems peculiar to small schools with an aim towards developing proposals to enhance educational opportunities for students in these schools". The investigation occupied several months. In the Advisory Panel's opinion, small schools were often weak schools. The Panel shared the concerns of small school teachers who believed that their instructional effectiveness was sharply reduced by being required to teach too many grades, with too many courses, with insufficient library, laboratory, remedial and enrichment services. The Panel concluded: "*In Newfoundland, 'small schools' will be part of our educational system for a long time and we must plan with the acknowledgment and knowledge of these schools and not in ignorance of their existence and importance*". The Panel made 33 recommendations for the improvement of education in small schools. With a cautionary note to the effect that the passage of time, and the vagaries of government attention, do not yet permit a full assessment of the impact of these recommendations, it can be noted that more than thirty of them remain in limbo. Department of Education statistics for the school year 1987-88 indicate that approximately 30% of our schools enrolling Kindergarten had 10 or fewer beginning class of 11-20 students. These statistics indicate that in the near future approximately 50% of the province's primary and elementary schools will be small, and will have multi-grade classes. Perhaps when small schools become the majority of schools, their financial, curricular and personnel needs will be meaningfully addressed. And so we voyage to discover a universe of education that has been discovered on at least two previous occasions. Will recognition and appreciation follow? (*NTA Journal*)

June, 1989, Vol.76 No. 1, p.27)

Small schools were subject to government reform efforts throughout the eighties, but Sutherland suggests,

They have been discovered by Commissions Royal and Panels Advisory. Yet, they have never been recognized. They have been the subject of eradication efforts, yet they survive. They have been the subject of sporadic reform efforts, yet few appear to have sincerely attempted to comprehend them, to understand their function and structure, to assess their needs, or to appreciate their values. (p. 1)

The uncertainty about the status of small schools in provincial schooling structures, was the context of the re-lived and retold story of school consolidation for Lawn students. The 1980 wave of attempted consolidation would have a crashing impact upon family life and it would further separate school board and community.

### **The Lawn Landscape in 1980**

The Lawn school system had an enrollment of three hundred and thirty three students in the 1979-80 school year. Nineteen students graduated that year and of those nineteen, eight students attended Memorial University of Newfoundland, one student attended a school of nursing, seven students attended other Colleges, and three students joined the Canadian Armed Forces (Holy Name of Mary Academy School Profile, updated June 2000).

Perhaps one of the strongest attempts by the Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula to consolidate the schools in Lawn and St. Lawrence occurred during the 1980 year when once again a decision was made to bus high school students from Lawn to St. Lawrence for one year. The School Board still insisted that the Lawn students would get

the best possible opportunity for a good education in St. Lawrence. However, the parents from Lawn still did not agree with the School Board's philosophy. In fact, some parents believed that their children were being sent to St. Lawrence in an attempt to fill to capacity the half empty DREE school. One respondent suggested that:

It wasn't about the quality of education. It was about money. They had the DREE school and now they had to fill it up. Mr. Don Jameison was the one who got the school and more power to him, but he pointed out at a meeting one time that the people of Lawn supported the school. Me and him had it out. There was a black book that was done up and went with the names of Lawn students in it that nobody knew anything about. (Val, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

This resident is referring to the inclusion of students from Lawn in the proposal to the federal government for funding for the DREE school. This inclusion was done without parent consultation. The Lawn School Improvement Committee, chaired by Mr. William Lockyer, was the official voice of Lawn residents in 1980.

William Lockyer, Chairman of the Lawn Parents Committee, which was formed last December (1979) when it was learned the school board was planning to transfer the grades 7 to 11 students to the DREE school in St. Lawrence, told The Daily News Thursday there is no longer any doubt that the school board will carry out its plans unless something is done. He said the people of Lawn first learned of the school board's intentions in December when Rev. Fr. Molloy, a parish priest in Lawn, tried to convince parents of the advantages of transferring the students. Mr. Lockyer said that the committee has already met once with the school board to argue against the transfer and submitted a brief in support of the committee's position. "It seems that reason and common sense cannot penetrate the dogmatic view of the school board," Mr. Lockyer said. (The Daily News: February 22, 1980)

As described later in this chapter, although the students from Lawn did attend school at St. Lawrence Central High for the 1980 - 81 school year, the move was controversial and the academic results were extremely unsatisfactory.

### **Voices of Educational Authorities: The Official Public Story**

For Lawn residents, the New Year of 1980 once again brought forth the old familiar battle of school consolidation. All the affected residents gathered at the school auditorium early in January of that year to hear the Board's decision about the future of their school, Holy Name of Mary High School. The School Board, supported by the parish priest, Father Kevin Molloy, informed those assembled that as of June, 1980, the school in Lawn would operate as a Kindergarten to grade six school only and that the junior and senior high school students would be bussed to the new DREE school in St. Lawrence. One resident remembers the meeting as follows:

They [the School Board] outlined their proposed plan to close the school the following June and there was much opposition. There were a lot of questions with no favorable answers. The Board said that students would have access to better facilities and a wider range of program offerings in St. Lawrence. It was never about the quality of education because our kids were getting a good education in Lawn. The whole reason behind the school closure was not from the lay people that were on the Board, it was totally controlled by the priests who were on the Board. I found that out later when I became a member. But at that meeting there was no more than two or three people who were willing to accept the proposal to go and the place was packed to the rafters. (Val, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

On February 4, 1980, a delegation of twelve people from Lawn approached the Board concerning the proposed consolidation. These people met with the Board's Executive and were requested to put their views on paper in the form of a brief for presentation to the entire School Board.

At the February 19, 1980, general meeting of the Roman Catholic School Board for the Burin Peninsula the Lawn Brief was circulated to all Board members.

Following lengthy discussion on the points raised in the brief, it was agreed that the brief was well presented, however, the Board is charged with the responsibility of making available to all students the best possible opportunity of a good education. It was moved that the Lawn High School consisting of Grades Seven to Eleven be phased out and the students be included in the DREE school located at St. Lawrence for the school year beginning September, 1980. (Board Minutes, February 19, 1980)

It was agreed that the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Kevin Pike would contact the Chairman of the Lawn Delegation and inform him of the Board's decision. Also, if the delegation expressed a desire to meet again with the Board, then they would be invited to the general meeting of the School Board scheduled for March 18, 1980.

Between February 19, 1980, and March 18, 1980, the parents of Lawn kept their children out of school and consequently, when the Lawn School Improvement Committee and residents of Lawn attended a public meeting of the School Board on March 18, 1980, the atmosphere was electric. At this meeting the Committee presented to the Board a letter from the Lawn Town Council outlining its reasons for objecting to the proposed move of grades seven to eleven students, a letter from the Greater Lamaline Area Development Association supporting the Lawn people was also presented, as well as a list of nine questions the Town Council wished the Board to answer. Because of the prevailing tension, the Board members moved into a separate room for a private discussion on the questions and the general meeting resumed fifteen minutes later. The School Board's response to the Lawn Delegation was recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

*Question #1 - On February 4, 1980 the School Board Executive agreed that a final decision would not be made on moving the students from Lawn to St. Lawrence until further meetings were held with the people of Lawn. Why was the decision made on February 18, 1980 without the promised meetings?*

Mr. Pickett (Acting Chairman) stated that the situation began when the DREE school negotiations started back in 1969-70. He stated that the communities of Lawn and St Lawrence are one in terms of School Board Zones which are based on Parish Boundaries. He emphasized that the ultimate responsibility of the Board is to provide the best possible opportunity to all the students under its jurisdiction. The original plan was to bring the [Lawn] high school students to St. Lawrence in 1974-75 or whenever the DREE school opened. The school was built to accommodate the Lawn and St. Lawrence High School students. The decision to move in September, 1980 is only part of the ongoing process happening since 1974 and before that. He stated that as an individual he recognizes the right of the people to decide where their students are going or not going. However, the people do not have the right to keep their children out of school. Let the children go back to school in Lawn and let us continue our debate for the next month or so. There is nothing wrong with the Board's decision and he would not want to be a part of the Board if the decision had not been made. However, on the implementation of it, let us talk. Mr. W. Lockyer, Lawn spokesman, asked what point is there to continue talking, while at the same time the Board makes decisions and proceeds with arrangements to move the students without consulting first with the people of Lawn. Mr. Pickett stated that we can only ask the people of Lawn to trust us.

*Question #2 - It has been stated that the information on enrollments contained in the brief from the Lawn Committee is incorrect. Who has the correct figures on enrollments and where do they come from?*

Mr. Pickett asked the Superintendent to speak on the question regarding enrollments. Mr. Dober quoted High School enrollments from 1969-79. He stated that while some figures are the same, there are a number of differences and he is not sure why. He pointed out that the number of students is the key in getting funds, teachers and courses in any school. Mr. Lockyer stated that the number of High School students in Lamaline isn't much greater than Lawn. Monsignor Walsh stated that we could not go any further in centralizing the Lamaline area. We should look at the point of a Parish Community as another type of Community.

*Question #3 - The people of Lawn were informed by Father K. Molloy that the students will definitely be transported by bus to St. Lawrence. When was this decision made?*

Mr. Pickett stated that the original plan goes back to 1969-70, when DREE funds were looked for to build a new High School for St. Lawrence and Lawn.

*Question #4 - Who is giving news releases to the Daily News and the Southern Gazette?*

Mr. Pickett stated that the write-ups in the issues referred to by the Delegation, were not news releases. They were editorials and no Board member has any control over what is said by the editorial writers.

*Question #5 - If the Board members are as concerned as they say they are about the Lawn students being out of school, why did it take the Board one month to decide to meet with the people of Lawn?*

Mr. Pickett stated that it is very difficult to get meetings other than our regular meetings, due to the distance some members must travel. He reminded the Committee, that because members are involved in other activities, our efforts to get a quorum to meet the people during the previous week were unsuccessful. Mr. Lockyer stated that Mr. Pike informed him that the Board did not want to meet until March 18, 1980. Mr. Pickett stated that the decision made at the previous meeting was that the Chairman would contact the Lawn Committee Chairman and if they wished to meet, then the Board would meet with them again on March 18, 1980. Father McGettigan recited an article which speaks out against the encouragement of students to become involved in boycotts and protests. He stated that it was not the Board's decision to keep the students home; the parents made that decision.

*Question #6 - If, in the District, there are only small numbers of students taking courses such as Physics, Chemistry, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, etc., how can the Board use this as an argument in favor of moving the Lawn students to St. Lawrence?*

Mr. Dober stated that according to the small figures given on the numbers enrolled in specialized courses, you must be quoting only those taking the courses in Grade Eleven and when looking at the courses you must consider that boys are involved in some, while girls are involved in others.

*Question #7 - If operating costs for Lawn High school is \$66 per student as compared to \$118 per student in other high schools, why close out Lawn High school and not others?*

Re: Operating Grants. The Business Manager stated that the information quoted by Mr. Lockyer is the cost per student for the whole system and not just the High School. It was agreed that a copy of the financial statistics will be provided to the Delegation and explained by the Business Manager.

*Question #8 - How does the School Board rationalize picking Lawn High school to phase out and why is it that Lawn has not received its fair share from the Board?*

Monsignor Walsh stated that Lawn has not been singled out. Centralization has taken place all over the District. The Board went to DREE for funding, and obtained the best School in the District for the benefit of the students of Lawn and St. Lawrence equally.

The final question to the Board from the Lawn Committee was not answered:  
*Question # 9- Was the Lawn people represented on the Committee to Ottawa for the DREE school in St. Lawrence?*

Mr. Pickett then called for a summation and asked for a final word from the Committee Spokesman. Mr. J. Edwards stated that the people want the Board to rescind its decision to move the students, improve the schools in Lawn and maintain the High School in Lawn as long as the student population and academic achievement remains at its present level. Mr. Lockyer stated that the people want an answer from the Board or the students will be kept out until June. Also, they will consider requesting the Archbishop to create a separate Parish for Lawn. Mr. Pickett suggested that discussions could be continued by a committee of the Board and the people of Lawn on condition that the kids are returned to school immediately. Mr. Lockyer stated that the present Committee has recommended that the kids go back to school, but the people are not willing to comply until the Board consults with them. Mr. J. Edwards agreed that the kids should go back to school and discussion continue between the people and the Board. Mr. Pickett stated that the Board will consider their position at the private session and notify the Lawn Delegation tomorrow morning. The private session began with a proposal from Mr. M. Pickett, Acting Chairman, that a Committee consisting of two Board members, two Professional Staff and four representatives of the Lawn people be appointed to continue discussion on the implementation of the move of Lawn High School Students to St. Lawrence. Mr. Pickett then vacated the chair and Mr. M. Haley took over as Acting Chairman. Mr. Haley stated that he will act as Chairman only for this meeting, as he is resigning from the Executive as of this meeting". (Board Minutes, March 18, 1980)

At the end of this meeting, the Board had reaffirmed its decision to move Lawn students to St. Lawrence and had appointed a committee consisting of Board members, professional staff, and representatives of the people of Lawn to implement the Board's

decision. The Lawn School Improvement Committee rejected outright the Board's decision - they did, however, work with the Implementation Committee in an attempt to seek a compromise solution to the impasse.

The Lawn Town Council next dispatched a letter to the Archbishop regarding the Board's decision. The Archbishop decided to appoint a representative to meet with the Council on his behalf as well as meet with School Board Executive and other Board members. "Monsignor D. Walsh stated that the meeting is scheduled for March 20, 1980, at 7:00 p.m. in Lawn. The Archbishop's representative will meet the Board around 9:30 p.m. at the Board office" (Board Minutes, March 18, 1980).

The Committee that had been established on March 18, 1980 to implement the Board's decision regarding Lawn reported to the full Board on April 21, 1980. The twelve members of the Lawn School Improvement Committee as well as 120 people from Lawn were present at the meeting on April 21, 1980.

Following more detailed discussion on the report, the Superintendent stated that the Board should be together on its reasons for the move. The Committee has been searching for a compromise. However, the original decision was made for financial reasons, problems with teacher allocation due to declining enrollment, and inadequate facilities in Lawn for High School students. He (the Superintendent) stated that when the Board's decision to move the students is implemented, the Board must assure the parents and students that it is willing to look into and resolve any problems they may encounter. Mr. M. Haley, Lawn member, stated that there are several statements in the report that cannot be backed up with facts, for example, centralization. He said many Boards are going back to de-centralization and a good example of this is taking place with the Grand Falls Board. He pointed out that our Educational Policy Committee had not considered the implications of moving the Lawn High School Students to St. Lawrence. Also, Mr. Haley stated that he cannot see the rationale for moving Primary students from the present building to the Lawn High School. Mr. Haley requested a copy of the DREE Agreement under which St. Lawrence High

School was built. He stated that Mr. Jamieson informed him that the Lawn students were not included in the original agreement. At the April 21, 1980 meeting Mr. William Lockyer, representing the people of Lawn asked if there was any change in the Board's position as result of the report prepared by the School Board - Lawn Committee. He also stated that the Board has had four different Chairmen in the last two months and he asked what is the problem. Monsignor Walsh replied that the Board's elected Chairman, has been ill. (Board Minutes, April 21, 1980)

At that meeting the people of Lawn wanted an answer as to whether or not the Board was prepared to consider any alternatives to sending the Lawn students to St. Lawrence. According to School Board Minutes, "They felt that all possible discussion had taken place and that a public meeting was scheduled for Lawn the following night" (Board Minutes, April 21, 1980). At this point the Board decided to meet privately. A more detailed discussion took place on the following points: alternatives set forth by Lawn representatives, curriculum, student morale, academic achievement, centralization verses de-centralization, DREE agreement, student transportation, and extra-curricular activities.

Although the decision to consolidate had been affirmed and reaffirmed by the School Board, the Lawn people steadfastly continued to refuse to accept the decision. Upon hearing that the School Board had not reversed its decision, several members of the delegation told the School Board members that "the people of Lawn no longer wished to be represented by this School Board" (Board Minutes, April 21, 1980).

### **Voices of the Lawn Residents: United As One**

The community reacted to the School Board's decision to transfer the Lawn students to St. Lawrence with anger, hostility, and resentment. The emotions were directed toward

the School Board for initiating the decision and toward the Parish Priest for supporting the move.

The Town of Lawn supported the actions of the newly formed Lawn School Improvement Committee in their desire to retain community schooling. It was argued that although declining enrolment might be a problem in the future, at present enrolment was steady. The Committee boasted that Holy Name of Mary had a near one hundred percent pass rate and that the courses offered would indeed prepare students for higher education. They argued that staff and community support for Holy Name of Mary could not be equaled anywhere else on the Peninsula or perhaps even in the Province. The Committee maintained that there exists a sense of school spirit at HNM that could not be measured in dollars. They believed, as did the majority of the community, that the decision to close the school was an economic one and that the quality of education for their children would not improve in St. Lawrence. These arguments were presented to the School Board and to the Parish Priest. We presented reasonable arguments but they fell on deaf ears. (Val, personal communication, October 1, 2001)

In ongoing and sustained protest, students boycotted classes and parents often descended on the school whenever a Board member was visiting.

One day Mr. Albert Dober, Board Superintendent was scheduled to visit the school. The crowds gathered on the school grounds, on the steps, and in the school's main lobby. Mr. Dober had to literally push his way through the crowd amid angry cries of protest to school closure. Once inside the building, the crowd would not allow him to leave the school. The news media heard about the protest and the local radio station reported on the midday news that the Superintendent of the Roman Catholic School Board is locked in the school at Lawn by a group of angry parents who are protesting school closure. (Patrick, personal communication, November 19, 2001)

On May 9, 1980, the Lawn Town Council wrote the then Minister of Education, Lynn Verge, informing her that the Town Council "no longer recognizes the R. C. School Board, as representing the best interests of the children and parents of Lawn in fostering the educational needs of the community". Council stated that:

The Board has treated our schools unfairly and this can be verified through

investigation. The Board has neglected to maintain the buildings properly. They have ignored the academic and other achievements of the school and manipulated facts, in support of their obsolete ideas that "Bigger is Better"? They have misrepresented the people of Lawn on a grand scale in the construction of the DREE High School in St. Lawrence. We feel that your Department should immediately investigate all aspects of the School Board's operation. They are proving to be tyrannical in their application of the powers bestowed on them by the Department of Education. They will go to any lengths, including the total disruption and agitation of communities to further their own aims which in most cases are designed to be self-serving and paternalistic towards the larger centers they represent. If the Board is allowed to carry out this action without care or fear of the consequences, then there has to be some doubts as to the validity of and motivation of other Government agencies which the Board are supposed to represent. It would appear that School Boards have achieved infallibility, and are above all other representative groups in the province. If this proves to be true then this ELECTED COUNCIL, can no longer assume the responsibility for the general improvement and well being of our community. If the Department of Education acting as representative of all people of Nfld., prove to be powerless to oversee or reckon with the School Board before the end of the current school year, then the Lawn Town Council will have no alternative but to resign in body on June 24, which is Newfoundland's Birthday. This would reflect our loss of faith in the ability of this province to cope with autocratic authority as wielded by the School Board. We adopt this attitude as a last resort, because we have a belief in justice for all. We have not made undue demands on either the Government or the School Board and we feel that the Board should not force unjust demands on us (Letter to Minister of Education, Lynn Verge, from Lawn Town Council, May 9, 1980)

The Honorable Lynn Verge visited the community and met with the Lawn School Improvement Committee to hear its concerns. She also attended the high school graduation at Holy Name of Mary at the end of the 1979-80 school year.

By the summer of 1980, the community of Lawn was in turmoil. The Lawn Town Council had resigned, the Lawn School Improvement Committee, supported by approximately ninety five percent of the community, maintained that the students would not go to St. Lawrence to attend school in September; the people felt a sense of betrayal from the

parish priest; and conflict arose between residents. "We told the Board not to bother to call tenders for busses or not to bother to transfer the teaching staff. The majority of the community felt a sense of betrayal from the parish priest. Many believed that he was supporting the St. Lawrence school but not the Lawn school" (Val, personal communication, October 1, 2001). These beliefs, whether justified or not, were reflected in a decreased attendance at weekly Mass and a growing conflict between priest and people. A former president of the Holy Name Society reported that the priest resigned as spiritual advisor to the Society because of issues related to the conflict.

When Archbishop Alphonsus Penny came to the parish in May, 1980, for the annual celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation, His Grace agreed to meet with the School Improvement Committee. However, any hope of anticipated support from the Archbishop was soon crushed when he stated his support for the School Board's plan. The meeting became a verbal confrontation and both parties left the meeting amidst a veil of hostility. A former member of the Committee remembers the meeting as follows:

I know the Archbishop was after receiving a few letters from some the people in the Town opposing the school closure. He was supporting the Board's position. The meeting was a waste of time. I remember everybody arguing. One person saying one thing and someone else saying something else. It didn't last very long. I remember showing him [the Archbishop] around the school and the grounds. In the end we gave up and went home because we were getting nowhere. (Val, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

At a regular School Board meeting on July 1, 1980, once again the School Improvement Committee pleaded with the Board to rescind its decision to consolidate. The Committee stated that, "The Town had been suffering from a poor economy and closing the school would add to the frustration of the people" (Board Minutes, July 1, 1980). Lawn

Mayor, Mr. Joseph Edwards, and three other councillors attended this meeting. Mr. Edwards made the following comments to the school board:

The delegation is here as representatives of the Lawn Town Council with an official request that the Board reverse its decision to transfer the grades seven to eleven students from Lawn to St. Lawrence. The phasing out of the high school in Lawn, following the closing on the mines and the poor fisheries over the past couple of years, is yet another drawback to the community and adds to the frustration already experienced by the people of Lawn. (Board Minutes, July 1, 1980)

Following the comments Father McGettigan tabled a copy of a letter to the Minister of Education from the Lawn Town Council and further discussion entailed on the issue.

Father K. Molloy stated that the letter is very accusatory and he wondered where the threats, such as turning over buses are coming from. He said there are people in Lawn who favor the moving of the students; however, these people feel threatened by others not in favor. Mr. Pickett inquired as to whether or not there has been any action from higher up. Father Molloy stated that the Archbishop has answered all telegrams and letters. Father McGettigan stated that nothing official has come from the Catholic Education Council. Mr. Haley reported that feedback from St. Lawrence indicates that some people, especially teachers, are upset that the extra 137 students will only give three extra teachers to the St. Lawrence Central High School. A letter from the teachers at St. Lawrence High School was tabled expressing concern over pupil-teacher ratio. Father Molloy stated that they are misinformed on the numbers and in his view, their concerns are unfounded. Mr. Haley stated that seniority is another concern for the St. Lawrence teachers, as many of the Lawn teachers have more seniority. Father McGettigan called for any further comments and/or suggestions that may warrant re-considering. After three calls, it was ruled by the Chair that there is no change in the decision. (Board Minutes, July 1, 1980)

On July 11, 1980 at 3:00 p.m., the Lawn Town Council by unanimous consent resigned to protest the School Board's decision to bus the Lawn school children to St. Lawrence. The mass resignation was tendered to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Of special note on July 11, 1980, the Lawn Town Council by unanimous consent resigned as a body at 3:00 P.M. to protest the School Board decision

to bus our school children to St. Lawrence. The mass resignation was tendered to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Councilors who resigned were: Joseph L. Edwards, David Drake, Gertie Lambe, Peter Haley, Jim Rogers, Fred Cox. On September 4, 1980, an appointed council took over the affairs of the town. They were: Joseph Edwards, Celestine Walsh, Joseph Grant, and William Lockyer (Town Council Minutes, July 16, 1980).

During the summer, the residents of the community speculated on what would happen in September. The parents insisted that their children were not going to St. Lawrence while the School Board maintained that they would have to go. One resident describes the scenario:

It was a beautiful sunny morning in September when the bus arrived to transport the students to St. Lawrence. Hundreds of people formed a human road block. People were shouting "Save our school!" Some people had eggs and they threw them at the cars of the people who were attempting to bring their children to St. Lawrence. I didn't agree with that. We didn't plan for that to happen. The bus was not allowed to make the run around the community. It parked at the first stop and one student got on the bus. You could cut the air the mood was so tense. The bus did not move because the human road block would not move. Eventually, the one student got off the bus and returned to her home. The police arrived then and the empty bus returned to St. Lawrence. Everyone cheered. The parents kept all the students home from school in protest. (Patrick, personal communication, November 19, 2001)

This same pattern of community protest continued for days. Hostility heightened between school board and people, between priest and people, and between the people themselves. There were a number of community residents who supported, if not the School Board's decision, then the priest's suggestion that their children would benefit from the transfer, and who were to some degree ostracized by some members of the community for that support. Neither the School Board nor the people would withdraw from their position for it seemed that each side was entrenched in its determination to win its battle.

The people vowed that they would keep their children out of school the entire year if they had to. At that time in 1980 we had it bad here. The Town Council had resigned. You see, the people never believed that the fight was about the quality of education because the people of Lawn always said that they would only fight for the school as long a good quality of education was offered. As far as we were concerned our kids were on par with any other school in the District. (Val, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

In September, 1980, a change occurred which was to bring about a break in the stalemate, and which was, in fact, reflective of another period in Lawn's educational history - the parish priest changed, and with the new priest there evolved a new direction and a new philosophy. Father Molloy left the region and Father John Maddigan was sent to replace him. "One of the main things about when all of this was happening was that Father John Maddigan came into Lawn. He was of a different opinion than the previous priest who was very strong minded that the kids would have to go"(Val, personal communication, November 21, 2001)

Father John Maddigan, once he had been fully apprized of the situation, supported upgrading the school in Lawn as opposed to closing it. He became the official spokesperson for the people of Lawn regarding school consolidation and he became the key negotiator between the School Board and the people of Lawn. Father John Maddigan's account of the Lawn saga is included in its entirety because it was so important to the development of the story.

Well the story of the Lawn school reads like a drama and it began for me when I came here to the parish of St. Thomas Aquinas in the early days of September, 1980. That was just before the school was about to open and when I came here, the Archbishop did not make me too alert as to the problem except that he said that a decision had been made on the school and that I was to abide by the decision of the former pastor. So I came out here with that understanding and then as the days approached for the school to open, I began to realize that there was a bigger problem than I had even

thought about.

On the first day of school I went to Lawn, and behind me there were two RCMP cars. I learned later that one of the cars had riot gear. So we knew there was going to be a problem but I didn't know exactly how severe it was going to be. I got to Lawn and there were a number of people there because it had been decided that the children would be bussed to St. Lawrence to the high school. So the busses were approaching Lawn as I got there followed by the RCMP, and I realized that this was a delicate situation and even dangerous. So the RCMP officers, who didn't know me, came to me then and said that there is a big problem. I could see that the mood of the people was very, very tense and rather hostile.

So I went to a family and asked if I could use their phone and they didn't know me at all but they said, "Go ahead, sir, and use the phone". So I called the Superintendent of the School Board whom I hadn't really known before and I told him about the situation. He told me that the busses would have to pick up the children because that was the decision of the School Board. But I told him that the children were not going to get on the bus and the parents are not going to permit them to get on the bus. He again said to me that it was a School Board decision and that he could not do anything about it. So then I told him that the people were at the bus now and that if the bus moves on there is going to be more people and somebody is going to get hurt and if a child gets hurt then that is going to be just terrible. Again he said that he couldn't do anything about it. And I remember one remark I made, I said, "Sir, I think the very first thing that the people might do is slash the tires". He said, "Well, they can't do that. These are new tires".

So then when I couldn't get any further on that, I got the idea of phoning the Minister of Education, at that time it was Lynn Verge. I got the Department of Education and I asked for Ms. Verge. They told me that she wasn't available. So I then told them who I was and where I was and they said to me, "Please wait where you are; Minister Verge is in Corner Brook but she will be very, very, concerned about your call and if you will wait there we will get back to you". With me was the officer of the RCMP. He was standing by me because he was very, very, concerned that things were going to get out of hand.

So within 15 minutes, I got a call from Minister Verge. So I told her the situation and my suggestion would be that the busses had come and complied with the order of the School Board and I suggested that now they return and say that they couldn't complete their mission through no fault of their own and that would save the School Board and the bus driver. She wanted to speak to the RCMP officer and I don't know what she said to him because I left the room. When he came out he told me that the situation was resolved and that the busses would be going back and that the Minister would get in touch with the officials to see what could be done from this point on.

So the busses did turn back. So then for successive days, the bus would come to Lawn, turn around, and leave with no incident.

Now we had the problem of what to do with the whole situation. So again I talked with the Minister and she said that it would take some time to solve the problem because for one thing the contracts had been made for the high school with teachers and any change there would possibly have a confrontation with contracts, with union, bussing, and a host of other problems. Then in the next few days, I ascertained that if the high school children would come to St. Lawrence the others could stay in Lawn and within the year they would resolve the problem so that [all] the children could stay in Lawn. Then I called a public meeting.

In the meantime, my Archbishop got in touch with me and he let me know that he wasn't very pleased with the way that I had interfered with the decision of the Board. I said to the Archbishop, "Your Grace, come out here and see for yourself that there was really no other solution". He thought that I was exaggerating. But I said, "If you insist on your position, I think you will lose a whole Catholic community". He laughed at that but he did agree to come out. He had Mass in Lawn that following weekend, and after Mass he said to me, "Father, you do what you think best". So that was resolved. I don't think I gained any favor but at least he realized that the problem was much greater than he had previously thought.

Further onto that now, we had the problem of making sure that the people would accept the fact that the senior students would have to go to St. Lawrence for a year and then the following year could return to Lawn. So I had a public meeting and there was some heated discussion and one person in the hall said to me, "Father, you give us this assurance but how can we trust you when we haven't trusted others who came before you". And I remember saying, "You really have no choice because you got to trust me. It wouldn't be worth my while staying here if I didn't comply with that". I remember him saying, "Then OK, we will trust you".

The children did come down [to St. Lawrence] for that year but they didn't really enter into the life of the school. They didn't participate in any other post school activities like drama, sport, or chess. They tolerated the year with the great hope that they would return to Lawn the following year and in point of fact, that is what happened and the school has continued on until this point. I would say that if there is anyone who needs a bouquet on this it would be Minister Verge. I think the Town would do well to send her a Christmas card at least.

There is another little aside to all of this. I was new down here, and now I started to go to the school board meetings. There was a kind of alienation against me, at least I perceived it. I had disrupted a major decision of the School Board and I had gone against what they had all agreed was the best for St. Lawrence and Lawn. So it took some time, if fact maybe it never

happened that I was fully accepted by the School Board. I don't think the animosity with the School Board itself was ever resolved. (Father John Maddigan, personal communication, November 20, 2001)

This remarkable description narrates an important turning point for the continuance of community schooling in Lawn. Father Maddigan's recognition of the passion of the people and his subsequent respect for their allegiance to their community won him their confidence and trust. In this case, the influence of the clergy was a powerful ally to the residents of Lawn.

The following statement outlines the final negotiated decision of the School Board for the Lawn students for the 1980-81 school year:

1. That Grades IX to XI students be bussed to St. Lawrence High School for the 1980-81 school year. That students of grades IX to XI who want to stay in St. Lawrence in 1981-82 be allowed to do so and teachers be provided in accordance with Board regulations and that their progress be monitored.
2. That the Primary School in Lawn - Kindergarten to grade III be reopened.
3. That grades VII and VIII remain in Lawn on a trial basis (3-5 years), monitored through enrollment and performance. (The elementary school would be kept open if the monitoring proved positive for grades VII and VIII).
4. That grades VII and VIII students go to St. Lawrence High School for specialized classes one day out of six (six day cycle), for industrial arts, home economics, etc., if acceptable.
5. That grades VII - VIII students who want to attend full time classes in St. Lawrence be permitted and encouraged to do so. That all students grades VII - IX who want to go to St. Lawrence this year and in the future be allowed free access to bus transportation and to the school in St. Lawrence.
6. That an effort be made to upgrade the Holy Name of Mary School, Lawn.(Board Minutes, September, 1980 )

Lawn high school students remained for one year at St. Lawrence Central while renovations were carried out at Holy Name of Mary. Academically, records show that the year presented

significant academic problems of low achievement. Out of fifty-eight students who attended, only twenty-eight students passed, seventeen students failed, and thirteen students dropped out. In interviews former students were asked to recall how they felt about their transfer to another school outside their own community. A female student reported, "I was lost and disassociated. I had been a class leader at home and a school organizer. There seemed to be no room for me in these roles at the St. Lawrence school" (Jane, personal communication, September 20, 2001).

Another student recalls the memory in the following way:

I felt very intimidated. I was a shy girl and the thought of walking into that school was my worst nightmare. Also the thought of being on that highway in the winter was very frightening. Both my parents were very concerned about me and opposed the move. I might add that one of my parents was from St. Lawrence. (Mary, personal communication, September 20, 2001)

Another respondent whose parents supported, if not the School Board decision, then the priest's suggestion to move, remembers the situation in a different way:

I felt nervous and afraid all at the same time. I was a young girl involved in Allied Youth, Church Choir, Sports etc. I was afraid of losing that connection. My parents were confused. They thought of the best education we were going to get. But not of the situation it put our family in. Clergy at the time were pretty powerful and convincing and I think my parents felt obligated to that suggestion that we go. My family went through a very hard time. We were the only family to go and register that first day. Our neighbors and other people in our community treated us very unfairly. Situations occurred that I will remember forever. We were scared to be in that big school all by ourselves. We lost our friends and neighbors because my parents agreed to go to St. Lawrence. We were looked down upon, people wouldn't talk to us, eggs were thrown at us every morning, and phone calls being made to us. We felt alone in more ways than one. People were mad and they had one opinion. My parents wanted us educated at all costs (Nell, personal communication, September 20, 2001).

Not all students completed the entire school year in St. Lawrence. One of the people

interviewed began the year, but dropped out shortly afterward.

I was very upset and distraught about the move. I did not know what to expect from this situation. I was fearful of having to leave my own school. My parents also were very upset. They felt that closing the school was like closing the best part of the community. Mom, in particular, was upset because she went through it before when she went to school in St. Lawrence. I can recall many a story about the rough times she had as a young student. But on the other hand she met many a good friend too. (Rick, personal communication, September 20, 2001)

When I asked these former students what they perceived to be the benefits of the relocation move, all but one respondent suggested that there were no real benefits to the move. Interviewees responded with the following comments: "I was told I couldn't do Biology because the class had already been filled. I then had to switch to a Modern Physical Science course. Then in Grade XI in Lawn, I had to do double Biology to get my Grade XI Diploma" (Nell, personal communication, September 20, 2001). Other responses to the perceived benefits were: "None, but all experiences in life whether good or bad contribute to your development as a person" (Jess, personal communication, September 20, 2001). "The year we went to St. Lawrence was a complete waste of time. Most of us failed which at that time put us back two years because we had to do Grade 12 [new graduation requirements were introduced]. The only benefit I can say that I got from that year was I would not want my children to go through what I did" (Mac, personal communication, September 20, 2001). "Years have passed but its funny how certain things can trigger that knot in your stomach. I didn't get any benefit from being there. I did not enjoy it. My family went through hard times with this move. I am glad that we have a great group of individuals that are willing to fight to accomplish the result of having a new school in Lawn" (Nell, personal

communication, September 20, 2001). One student commented that the perceived benefits of the move were, "The long lasting friendships I made and still have"(Jane, personal communication, September 20, 2001).

In September, 1981, the doors of Holy Name of Mary once again opened for high school students. For many Lawn residents, the victory was attributed to Father John Maddigan who had devoted himself to the struggle.

In an attempt to understand the apparent importance of this particular school to the community, I was interested in hearing how these former transfer students, now parents living in Lawn, felt about the present school system in Lawn. The following comments are their impressions of the school in Lawn today:

I am very proud to say that I am from Lawn. The school may be a bit run down but the spirit lives on. There is a great student teacher relationship. They know each other on a personal basis. It is one of a big family. It makes me proud to know that my two children are getting the best possible education close to home. I know that if they have a problem that I can go to the school and sit down and discuss the problem with the teachers who really care about the education that your children are getting. This small school has produced and will continue to produce lawyers, doctors, teachers, nurses as it has in the past. I am proud that I graduated from Holy Name of Mary and I feel that I would not be where I am today if not for the guidance and leadership I received while attending school. (Paul, personal communication, September 16, 2001)

The school in Lawn today in my opinion is of top quality, academics come first. Teacher/student relationships are of the utmost importance. It was good when I went to school in Lawn and now I have two children attending Holy Name of Mary Academy and it has gotten better. The teachers should be commended because we know they go beyond their duties. (Laura, personal communication, September 26, 2001)

"It's small, cozy, it's home, and everyone feels it as they spend time there. Students are happy there. It is the community." (Mary, personal communication, September 16, 2001)

These accounts reveal that parents are very satisfied with their community school.

### **My Personal Story: A Parent's Perspective**

As a parent in the 1980's, I remember feeling a mix of emotions ranging from fear to anger as attempted consolidation once again became the issue in our lives. We saw our school as a place of pride, of opportunity, of hope and of success. It was the center of our community and I remember feeling insulted that others from outside the community could actually make a decision to take and to destroy, what was ours. It was as if someone came into my backyard and took my belongings without asking and with no intentions of giving them back. The emotions were twofold: anger, which was directed toward the people who felt they had a right to take, and fear that the scenario was on its way to becoming a reality. It was not about democracy for no one had asked our opinions; it was not about treating people with respect for we believed that our rights had been violated. I felt that it was about forces external to the community de-valuing what the community held in such high esteem. It became a survival struggle, since community life was so very much interconnected with the community school - a key connection that successive school boards failed to realize when attempting school consolidation. It was not just about closing a school or even part of a school - it was about impinging on community values of pride and identity and on a community's vision for educating children.

I didn't really understand the depth of my emotions regarding the Lawn school until I was getting my oldest child ready for Junior Kindergarten in Downsview, Ontario.

Sitting in the second floor apartment, I watched my four year old playing school with her Holly Hobbie doll. School was the topic of discussion these days because she would start Junior Kindergarten in just a few weeks. I recall feeling a sadness that her introduction into school would not offer the same sense of belonging that she would have experienced in Lawn. We had planned to be back home by the time she started Kindergarten. For unarticulated reasons it was important to us that she start school in Lawn. We did return to Newfoundland the following year and she eventually did start Kindergarten at St. Paul's Primary in Lawn. (Reconstructed from memory, November 20, 2001)

An unexpected deep longing to share my rootedness with my daughter shadowed the anticipation of this transitional activity.

When I returned to the community after a four year absence, I attended the public meetings and was actively involved in the protest against the School Board's decision to close the Lawn High School. I was present in the school the day that the Superintendent, Mr. Albert Dober, was surrounded by parents and I recall the incident vividly.

The small school lobby was shoulder to shoulder with faceless people. Although I was actually there as a parent, it felt as if I were suspended in time, regarding at the scene from a distance. The only face I remember clearly is that of the Superintendent who was desperately trying to tell the people that the children should be in their classrooms. Although his words were strong, his eyes looked lost and his hair looked windblown. The words of the faceless people were loud and angry and I remember feeling sorry for the Superintendent. I had this sense that something was wrong in this whole picture. To this day, I can still see the look on that man's face. It is not a comfortable memory. (Reconstructed from memory, December 2, 2001)

Such incidents are not recalled without regret at the personal costs of the divisiveness in the community. Like most people in the community, I felt consumed by the school consolidation issue. It became an inherent part of the lives of the entire population. Although ninety-five percent of the community was united on the effort to save the school, I suspect people felt as I did - that our lives were in suspended turmoil. We were adamant in our cause, but no

one enjoyed the conflict that developed between community members, between priest and people, and between School Board and people. Yet, the fight was about our children, their future, and the future of the community. The fight stemmed from our belief that our children's educational needs, would be best met within our own community. Parents were not willing to let Board members, who were not personally affected, make choices that they felt would negatively impact upon their children and their community. The struggle, then, was not about a school building; it was about a people. It was about mothers, fathers, and community residents fighting to protect their most cherished possession - their children. The School Board had a vested educational interest in the Lawn situation but the parents of Lawn had the essence of their lives, their children, invested in that educational interest.

### **Reflections and Ruminations**

By 1980, the Roman Catholic School Board was determined to carry out its initial plan to transfer the Lawn students into the St. Lawrence system. However, the parents of Lawn were just as determined to resist the move. As the official school authority and rural residents argued over the best educational environment for the children of Lawn, the conflict intensified and the argument reached far beyond the boundaries of Lawn. However, the voices of the people were no longer isolated voices on the landscape. By 1980, democratic structures were evolving and the Lawn people gained a louder voice and an increased authority within those structures. Their voices could be heard through the official voices of an organized Concerned Parents' Committee, a School Improvement Committee, an elected Town Council, and a representative on the School Board. These voices were acknowledged

by a supportive parish priest and heard by the Minister of Education.

The rural parents' conflict with an official authority, the Roman Catholic School Board, had escalated into a conflict between a number of official authorities. A power shift had occurred within the Lawn story and there now existed an increasing balance of authority between the voice of the School Board and the voice of the rural residents. It seemed that the voice of the people of Lawn was becoming more dominant and more determined with each attempted consolidation movement. The residents' driving passion to maintain community schooling was beginning to be recognized by official school authorities. A major turning point for the Lawn residents occurred when Father John Maddigan arrived as parish priest, as a clerical authority, hearing the passion of the people and recognizing its strength, he made a decision to work within it. Representing the Lawn people, his voice carried their message to other official authorities. Eventually, their story gained recognition and perhaps even respect as being a school story of strength, determination, and survival. It was no longer just the Lawn school story, for other official school authorities were beginning to take ownership of the struggle and began to work on behalf of the Lawn people. Voices became united, strength increased in numbers, and power shifted to a rural people working inside the boundaries and limitations of a democratic system.

## CHAPTER SIX

### AN ERA OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

1981 - 2001

This chapter narrates the conclusion of Lawn's story of saving its community school. These twenty years witness a 'coming of age' of the residents in terms of growth in knowledge of political process and activism: they learned to author their own story. This chapter reviews continuing provincial educational reform and its effect on small schools, focuses on the Lawn context, and then demonstrates how two sets of voices, previously opposed, became united in their efforts to support the Lawn community school. It describes my personal and professional dilemmas during this period and concludes with an interpretation of the unfolding of events over two decades of profound educational change.

#### **An Intense Period of Educational Reform in Newfoundland and Labrador**

Newfoundland and Labrador witnessed unprecedented change in education in the period between 1981 and 2001. Declining enrolments, pressures to increase achievement levels, and decreasing financial resources were concerns that the provincial government felt could not be ignored therefore it established an inquiry into the province's school system. *Our Children, Our Future*, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, and Secondary Education chaired by Dr. Len Williams (1992)<sup>1</sup> concluded with 211 recommendations to the Newfoundland Government.

These are the developments of a new mandate for schooling; the restructuring

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<sup>1</sup>Hereafter, this report will be referred to as the Royal Commission Report (1992).

of the system's administration at the provincial, school district, and school levels, and the establishment of non-denominational school boards in place of the present system; the full involvement and enfranchisement of the public in the governance of the system; the development of attainment standards of students; the refinement of the process of curriculum development and implementation; and the improvement of existing practices at every level of the school system. More specifically, it proposes publicly elected school boards funded on the basis of need, teachers employed on professional merit, church involvement at the provincial and school levels, and appropriate religious education programs for all school students. (Williams, 1992:2)

Government proceeded to initiate such educational reform throughout the 1990s holding two referenda on the recommendation from the Royal Commission to change the delivery of education from a denominational to a public system of education. In her doctoral thesis, Dunne (1998) summarizes the outcome:

In the first referendum (September, 1995), Premier Clyde Wells asked the provincial population for approval of an amendment to the Constitution so that church control over education could be diminished; in the second referendum, the new Premier Brian Tobin asked for an amendment that would completely remove the power of the churches to influence education. In the first vote, the government position won by a slim margin (54%); in the second vote (September, 1997), the populace, having experienced the turmoil of implementing the first set of legislation, compounded by a reversal of the legislation by the courts, supported the position of the government which won by a large majority (73% ) (p. 200).

In *Change and Challenge A Strategic Economic Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador* (1992) prepared by government with input from the business community and local people, recommendations regarding education included:

Establishing a Kindergarten - Grade 12 Education System that is student and classroom oriented, and capable of responding to the changing requirements of society and the economy. Specifically, the province will "streamline the present school system to make it more efficient, cost effective and responsive; the money generated through such changes will be reinvested in education resources that are of most benefit to students. (p. 28)

In the same year, the Royal Commission recommended that, "school consolidation be considered on the following grounds: schools which are not viable and are within reasonable distance of another school, be targeted for consolidation, and, schools which are not viable and are not within reasonable distance of another school, be mandated a basic foundation program" (p. 23). Set guidelines for school viability stated that, "viability be considered in relation to the enrolment, location and quality of school facilities, the scope of the programs offered, the availability of resources within the school, the types of services available within the surrounding area, and the attainment of provincially developed standards of achievement" (p. 23).

A document from the Department of Education entitled, *Adjusting The Course: Restructuring the School System for Educational Excellence* (1997) referred to school consolidation as follows:

Prudent management of public funds would dictate that facilities ought not to be maintained under conditions of declining use, when consolidation can produce economies in both capital and operating costs. While the actual level of duplication of services across denominations is less than some would believe, the problem is real and is highly visible in certain communities. It must be recognized, of course, that school consolidation will remain a problem even under reorganization, because of local community politics, traditional patterns of community cooperation or competition, and a very real decline of some communities to the point where the loss of a school can be a substantial threat to community viability. In the absence of firm guidelines on school consolidation, the later factors become the major influences on decisions, and consolidation therefore remains a somewhat ad hoc process. It is important to point out that not all problems of school viability can be solved through consolidation. (p. 15)

Educational change was a Government focus for Newfoundland and Labrador and the effects of these policies reached into every corner of the Province, including the community of Lawn

on the Burin Peninsula.

### **Lawn and Its Landscape 1981-2001**

In the meantime, in 1982, a major renovation and upgrading project was completed on the elementary and high school sections of Holy Name of Mary Academy (HNMA). As promised, the high school students returned from St. Lawrence and following the initial year (1981-82) (during which most of the dropouts of the previous year returned to school), the school and the community settled into a rather uneventful decade. During that time, HNMA developed a reputation for high academic achievement, a high degree of involvement and success in athletics, and a spirit of community involvement. Consolidation and/or integration appeared, for the time at least, to have been placed on the back burner of school board and community consciousness.

Ten years later, in 1992, the Williams' Report recommended "changing the delivery of education from a denominational to a public system of education". This proposed change from a Roman Catholic denominational system to a public system at first threatened, and then, provided opportunity for the Lawn people. The residents opposed changing the delivery of education for two reasons: firstly, they felt that their school was already providing a good education; and secondly, they feared that change would mean the specter of school consolidation would raise its head again. However, in the 1997 provincial referendum the majority of the people of the province voted to dismantle the denominational system and educational change began to occur. School boards combined, and under the new non-denominational Burin Peninsula School Board once again the Lawn school system was faced

with school consolidation. The Liberal Government began reform efforts by initiating a process of extensive public consultation. These public forums provided an opportunity for Lawn residents to present their views on community schooling to the political leaders of the province. At the same time, newly legislated school councils were becoming a political force on the education scene, and the Holy Name of Mary School Council became the new, official voice of the people. As well, the residents of Lawn had supported and aided the election of a local candidate, Mr. William Lockyer, to the newly formed Burin Peninsula School Board which replaced the two existing denominational boards. His voice, too, spoke on behalf of the Lawn people.

History had prepared the residents of Lawn, and their elected representatives, for the battle which was about to unfold. They regrouped, and strategized against the anticipated decision to once again close Holy Name of Mary Academy. The angry public protests that were visible in the 1980's would not be as evident in this new round of consolidation attempts, for this would be an era of strategic political planning more so than public protests and picket lines. Protests still occurred on at least two occasions, and the threat of public protest was always imminent, but in this round of school consolidation, the official government inquiries, reports and strategic plans on education were challenged by inquiries, reports, and plans from a group of Lawn residents.

#### **Combining Voices: School Board and Residents**

Following the intense school consolidation battle in 1980, the period between 1981 - 1992 was relatively quiet. It could be viewed as an educational growth period in which the

school proceeded to excel in both curricular and co-curricular activities. The results of a 1987 Criterion Reference Test for Grade Six Science demonstrate that the Lawn students scored higher than the Board and higher than the Province. In a 1992, Provincial Quality of School Life Survey (QSLS), Grade Eight students were asked to describe among other things their satisfaction with school. According to the survey, the majority of Lawn students felt that school was a positive place and that they were proud to be students there.

There was no recorded conflict between the School Board and the parents of Lawn during this time. In fact, it appears that the issue of school closure was for a time at least a sleeping tiger. The issue of school consolidation did not begin to resurface until the publication of the report from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary, Secondary Education (Royal Commission, 1992). Term 2 of the Terms of Reference required the Commission to "examine the extent to which school districts and schools can be further consolidated and costs associated with such consolidation"(p. 150). Although the idea never really moved beyond the pages of the Royal Commission Report, in the cited examples of communities for which consolidation along denominational lines was suggested, "Holy Name of Mary Academy, Lawn was recommended to consolidate with St. Joseph's Academy in Lamaline" (p. 160).

As I began to narrate the school consolidation movement during this period, I found it difficult to separate the voice of the Burin Peninsula School Board from the voices of the Lawn people. The stories were becoming interconnected and, over time, began to speak in unison.

Although the Royal Commission Report was published in 1992, the recommended

changes did not really have a major impact on the Lawn school system until just prior to the 1995 public referendum on amending the Constitution so as to eliminate church control over education in Newfoundland. Many residents opposed the constitutional change preferring instead to maintain the status quo. Yet, the government position was supported by a public majority and the denominational education system changed to a public education system. A domino effect began with reference to school reform. By the mid 1990s there seemed to exist at the local and provincial level a prevailing attitude among the populace that vast education reform was imminent in the province. In Lawn, the school consolidation movement did indeed resurface as many had predicted and once again the fear arose that the small school in Lawn would finally succumb to consolidation.

In 1996, the new Liberal Government proceeded with educational reform and committed itself to dialogue and discussion on all elements of implementing educational reform. Extensive public consultation began throughout the province. As dialogue proceeded to unfold between the representatives of the people of Lawn and the education representatives of the Provincial Government, these voices often echoed the same patterns of concerns regarding the quality of education for Newfoundland students. Eventually, the voice of the Burin Peninsula School Board and the voice of the people of Lawn were to become one blended voice regarding district plans for the school in Lawn. However, this blending of voices occurred only after a five year process of strategic planning by the various individuals and organizations who valued the small rural school, and after much political activism.

In 1998 when the Minister of Education at the time, Roger Grimes, came to

Marystown for public input on education from the Burin Peninsula residents, the School Council of Holy Name of Mary Academy hired busses to ensure that all residents had an opportunity to attend the meeting. Sixty percent of the audience at Sacred Heart Elementary School that night consisted of Lawn residents. Close to one half of the briefs that were presented to the Minister of Education and his Panel at this session pertained to Holy Name of Mary Academy. The Member of the House of Assembly for Grand Bank, Ms. Judy Foote, was in attendance that night. Mr. James Rogers, Chairman of Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council presented a brief to the Minister of Education on behalf of the people of Lawn. Among other things, the brief outlined the strengths of the local school in Lawn and cited research about the strengths of small schools in general. It compared the economic crises in rural Newfoundland, caused by the cod moratorium, to a country like Norway which had witnessed a fishery crisis in the 1980's but which offered a productive rural fishery in the present. Finally, the brief provided a future vision of education in Lawn connecting the community school to the economic life of the community in the information age. The following text is a section of the presentation to the Minister of Education:

The idea of bussing children into a centralized location for education is an outdated concept. As we prepare to take the students of this province into the next century we must recognize that such movement will take place in an information age. If we look into the future we can easily envision a classroom where students' interaction and travel takes place via computer. Even at present, rural students can connect via computer to any course offering in the province. Students can interact with other students and teachers in Canada and in the world. It is not necessary for viability to be based on numbers. Viability should be based on curriculum considerations. A school should be viable as long as it can offer a challenging curriculum to its students and as long as it maintains a level of successful achievement comparable to the rest of the province and the country. Distance education, and online conferencing, are fast becoming an acceptable, challenging, and current model for effective

program delivery; not only on a high school level, but also at a university level. Many of our rural schools already have the technology and the expertise in place to offer these programs. The technological advances in today's society are changing the face of Newfoundland communities - not only in education but also in the business sector as well. For example, Newfoundlanders have developed radar software, an off shore oil rig escape system, and ice detection system for planes. High tech business in Newfoundland is achieving what was thought impossible ten or twenty years ago. A Buchans Company makes parts for General Electric Aerospace. More new business started up in Newfoundland since 1994 than anywhere else in Atlantic Canada. Due to the cod moratorium and the economic situation in Newfoundland, one might assume that rural communities will cease to exist. However, such a prediction may be premature and unfounded. Norway, for example, witnessed a fishery crisis in the 1980's, however, today many rural communities in Norway participate in a productive fishery. Is it not possible for the same to occur in Newfoundland? If so then small rural communities will once again be productive communities. Around the world rural populations served by small schools are substantial. Their strengths as well as their evident needs are significant and policies should attend to both (Brief presented to the Minister of Education, Roger Grimes, November, 1997).

The brief was well received.

Changes in provincial educational legislation also introduced the establishment of school councils for all schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. While others debated the value of school councils, the people of Lawn quickly organized to establish one of the first organized school councils on the Burin Peninsula. In January, 1997, Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council now a duly legislated authorized body, became an organized group of individuals who strategically planned to keep the K- 12 school system in Lawn. As part of the School Council but working within the school itself, the School Improvement Team worked to further improve the strengths of Holy Name of Mary Academy. Focus projects included compiling a detailed school profile, establishing a preschool and adult basic education program at the school, establishing a breakfast program, and promoting

professional development for teachers and parents on issues pertaining to rural education.

The organization efforts continued when the time came to elect the new non-denominational school board. Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council, the Lawn Town Council, and the residents of Lawn all worked together to support and help elect a local candidate to the school board. Mr. William Lockyer, the Mayor of Lawn, had a rich history with the school in Lawn and with fighting the consolidation movement. He too, dedicated himself to Lawn's struggle to retain the community school.

It all goes back to parents and the concern of parents that their children would get a good quality of education. Parents wanted to know if their children were getting a good education equal to the other schools and then they would stick behind any Committee. If you lose a school or if you lose anything out of a community then that community starts to downfall. (Personal Interview: Mayor William Lockyer. November 21, 2001)

On April 18, 1998, the School Board issued a "call for proposals" to undertake a facilities review. The successful company was Central Consulting Services Inc. whose review was completed and a report submitted to the School Board on November 3, 1998. Section 4 of the report dealt with the plans for the re-organization. The recommendations pertaining to Holy Name of Mary Academy, Lawn were as follows:

- 1) In June, 1999 the All Grade School at Lawn should close and the students be bussed to St. Lawrence Central High School.
  - 2) A transition team be established to oversee the transition of students from Lawn to St. Lawrence.
  - 3) Consideration to be given to the creation of a vice-principal position at St. Lawrence to oversee the transition and liaise with students and parents.
- (Central Consulting Report, November 3, 1998)

The announcement came as no surprise to anyone in Lawn and within an hour of the release of the report recommending the closure of the Lawn school system, the School

Council and the parents of the community reacted to the announcement through an organized protest. The protest, in the form of a boycott planned as two days' duration only, was directed at sending a message to the School Board that once again the Lawn parents would fight any school closure decision.

It was not the intention of the School Council or the parents to issue any ultimatum to the School Board, nor to back themselves into a corner from which there could be no retreat. Rather the purpose of the protest was to send a swift and forceful message that the Council and the parents would do all in their power to maintain the system as it existed. (Personal Interview: Jim Rogers, School Council Chairman 1996-2000, November 20, 2001)

Other significant events occurred in the education system at Lawn in 1998. Beginning in late 1997, the School Council and the Town of Lawn made a joint submission to the Burin Peninsula School Board proposing the closure of the former St. Paul's Primary School intending to bring all students together in the one school at Holy Name of Mary Academy. The move was made not only as a cost saving measure to the Board, but also as a means of deploying staff for the optimum delivery of programs at Holy Name of Mary Academy. The School Board accepted the request and the former St. Paul's Primary School closed in June 1998.

Perhaps a key educational decision of the late 1990s as it pertains to the Lawn System of Education was the designation of Holy Name of Mary Academy as a Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Necessarily Existent Small School (NESS). The Schools Act, 1997, Section 77 makes four provisions for the establishment of such small schools:

- 1) A board may establish, maintain and operate a school where the school provides programs or courses of study that satisfy the minimum requirements as approved by the minister.

2) The minister shall determine and, by order, specify a school that is a small school, and the grades which may be taught in that school, in which the requirements of subsection (1) cannot be met, but the school must be maintained and operated because of isolation or because the students cannot reasonably be accommodated in another school.

3) A school specified in an order under subsection (2) shall receive an allocation of resources, as approved by the minister, additional to the allocation of resources provided for schools not specified in the order under subsection (2).

4) The board shall ensure that an additional allocation received under subsection (3) for a school is used in that school. (The Schools Act, 1997)

Upon application from a School Board, a Ministerial Order is issued including the schools to be designated and the grade configuration of the designated school. Although the Lawn school received NESS status in January 1999, the School Board first requested NESS status for Lawn on November 25, 1997 when the Director of the Burin Peninsula School Board accepted a proposal from Holy Name of Mary Academy's School Council requesting that HNMA be designated as a Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Necessarily Existent Small School. The detailed proposal argued that NESS status should be given to HNMA based on community factors, school size and academic performance, as well as, technological factors and future trends. The following excerpt from the brief elaborates on the community factors which the School Council deemed as reasons why Holy Name of Mary Academy should be a Necessarily Existent Small School:

According to Bryant and Grady (1990) three general principles of rural organization which explain school stability within rural communities are: the principle of centripetalism, the principle of inclusiveness, and the principle of distinctiveness. All three of these principles can be identified within the community of Lawn; all three of which are reasons to designate Holy Name of Mary Academy as a Necessarily Existent School. The first principle that unifies small rural towns like Lawn is that of centripetalism, the tendency of

various social and economic forces to centralize. In Lawn the school is the center for the townspeople. Community organizations, individuals, and businesses confer belonging, prestige, and reputation upon Holy Name of Mary Academy. The school is central to the social and organizational ties to community life. Any loss to school life will result in a loss of community life. The principle of inclusiveness works to hold residents of small towns together. Again, the importance of HNMA to the town's inclusiveness cannot be underscored enough. Social identity in Lawn is a community matter. In a larger city center, this may not be the case because social identity tends to be established more in an individual's private sphere. The school is central to the social and cultural identity of the people of Lawn. Social activities, drama productions, Christmas concerts, and particularly athletics, provide an opportunity for a community event that all community members can and do attend. Holy Name of Mary Academy exists as a major component to the town's social distinction, held together by common beliefs and values, and a sense of school ownership. (Brief prepared for the BPSB Community Factors that deem HNMA as a NESS, November, 1997)

The interim Burin Peninsula School Board, at a regular meeting on Friday, November 25, 1997 directed the Director of Education, Mr. Mike Siscoe, to submit the names of ten schools in the district for NESS status. Included in the submission was Holy Name of Mary Academy, Lawn, K-12. On December 10, 1997, Mr. Gary Hatcher, Director of School Services and Professional Development, Department of Education, requested the rationale used to identify schools on the list that had been submitted as Small Necessarily Existent. The rationale given for requesting that Holy Name of Mary Academy, Lawn be designated NESS (K-12) was as follows:

Lawn is located about 15 minutes from St. Lawrence. The road is paved but it is over open barrens and subject to severe winter conditions. The high school, on two occasions in the past, was bussed to St. Lawrence. This was in the late fifties and early sixties. They were again bussed in 1980. During the last stay in St. Lawrence, one half of the students either failed or dropped out. When the students have stayed in Lawn, they have been very successful; i.e. of their high school graduates from 1962 onward, 90% have gone on to some post-secondary training. In the recent Chemistry APEF results, they achieved the highest score in the district. The Board believes that any

movement of students should enhance opportunities for students. Given the past history it appears that this may not be the case if the students go to St. Lawrence. (Burin Peninsula School Board Discussion Paper: The Long Term Plan for Education in the Community of Lawn, March 8, 2001)

“The School Council and Mayor Lockyer were very pleased to hear that the School Board agreed to request NESS status from the Department of Education” (Personal Interview: James Rogers, School Council Chairman, November, 21, 2001). However, In March, 1998, Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council was informed that NESS was denied for the Lawn school; and, as usual, the Council chose not to accept this decision without protest. On June 17, 1998, the School Council once again made a request to both the School Board and the Minister of Education requesting that Holy Name of Mary Academy once again be considered for designation as a Kindergarten to Grade Twelve Necessarily Existent Small School. As well, a delegation consisting of School Council and Town Council members, traveled to St. John's to meet with the Minister of Education, Honorable Roger Grimes, to discuss all aspects of the Lawn School System.

“On December 15, the School Board again directed Mr. Siscoe to request NESS Status for nine schools in the District, including Holy Name of Mary, Lawn, K-12. The rationale used was the same as that submitted in 1997. On January 15, 1999, Holy Name of Mary Academy was designated as a K - 12 Necessarily Existent Small School” (Burin Peninsula School Board: Long Term Plan for Education in the Community of Lawn, March 8, 2001).

According to Central Consulting's Review of the Delivery System of Education on the Burin Peninsula, the all grade school at Lawn was slated to close in June, 1999 and all

students were to be bussed to St. Lawrence. Yet, the Department of Education had designated HNMA as a NESS for the 1999 - 2000 school year and as such the School Board would receive a specified level of staffing for the school. The recommendations of Central Consulting were contrary to what was in fact a School Board decision and Government legislation regarding HNMA's designation.

On June 19, 2000 the School Board requested an Engineering Review of the school in Lawn. As expected by all concerned, the building assessment verified that the building was in desperate need of repair. "It was determined that the building was in poor condition. The building shows apparent signs of a building which was maintained and added to with local effort and little or no adherence to various codes and good construction practices. With current conditions the life of the building is limited" (School Assessment Report and Summary, November 2, 2000)

At the December meeting of the Board it was agreed that the Board Chair and trustees would meet with the school administration and the School Council to solicit feedback on the assessment prior to tabling the report with the Board. The meeting with the administrators was held on January 9, 2001 and with the School Council on January 11, 2001. During the meeting with the school administration, a seventy page proposal was presented to the Board Chair to consider a pilot at Lawn for a Community Learning Center that would include a K-12 school.

The school community is requesting that the School Board approach the Department of Education with the intention of having constructed a new educational structure for the community of Lawn. The community envisions the center as providing more than just K-12 curriculum. It would serve as the center of the community through which all government services would be

delivered and focus on creating a culture of continuous learning in the community from pre-conception throughout the complete life of the community residents. (Community Learning Center Proposal, January 9, 2001)

The Community Learning Center pilot project was again discussed on January 11, 2001 when the School Board Chairman, the Southern Zone Trustees, the new Director, and both Board and School Administration met with Holy Name of Mary Academy School Council. The School Council indicated to the Board Chairman that in its view, there are only two options which exist regarding the building assessment report of the Lawn school. "The School Council feels that the School Board can either renovate the existing K-12 building or construct a new K- 12 school for the community of Lawn" (School Council Minutes, January 11, 2001).

In the meantime, a new Director was appointed to the Burin Peninsula School Board. In my personal journal I noted his first visit to the school:

The first day the new Director, Mr. Barry Roberts, came to visit the school. I was walking through the corridor on my way to another class when I was introduced to Mr. Roberts. I said, "Hello, nice to meet you sir -- so, you're the man who is going to get us a new school". Shaking my hand he smiled and said, "Ahh, but not today, right"? (Personal Journal, October, 2000)

On January 23, 2001 the Board Chairman briefed the trustees on the meetings at Lawn. The Director tabled a discussion paper recommending that the Board support "in principle" the concept that a school could be part of a community center. "This, along with two other recommendations in the report, was approved. Specifically, a meeting with the Minister was to be arranged to discuss the concept, and that following the meeting with the Minister, the Board would discuss its response to the engineering assessment and the long

term plans for Lawn" (Board Minutes, January 23, 2001).

A joint meeting between the School Board executive and the Minister of Education, a position now occupied by the Honorable Judy Foote, was held at District Office on March 2, 2001 to discuss the future of Holy Name of Mary Academy in Lawn. Among other things, the discussion focused on Necessarily Existent Small School Status, the Lawn Community Learning Center Proposal, and the School Board's priority for new school construction.

Mr. Keating (Board Chairman) called this meeting to order and thanked Minister Foote for meeting with the Board in response to a letter requesting an opportunity to discuss the future of Holy Name of Mary Academy, Lawn. In the letter requesting this meeting, the Board is trying to determine the status of the Lawn proposal from the Government's perspective, and in light of the assessment there is an urgency in addressing the condition of the building. Having thanked the Board for the invitation to discuss the Lawn proposal, Minister Foote stated the Department's policy regarding supporting any proposal. In any part of the province, the Department makes decisions based on what the Board for the area decides its requirements are, and it is always important for the Department to know what the Board intends. The only interaction in decisions regarding a new school would be the design and cost in conjunction with the School Planning Manual. Minister Foote questioned whether the Board of Trustees have given Lawn top priority for new construction. It was explained by Mr. Keating that the Board had not given Lawn any consideration, as the focus of restructuring has concentrated on other areas of the District, and the Trustees have not gotten to discuss what was necessary for Lawn, [the circumstances], however, have been circumvented by the Lawn proposal. Minister Foote explained the issue for her and her Department will be the request of the Board and whatever is the priority of the Board. She will only act on the recommendation from the Board. (Board Minutes, March 2, 2001)

As it pertains to the Lawn concept paper and NESS status, the following discussion transpired:

Minister Foote spoke to the Lawn concept paper, and was very impressed as it is very much in line with the initiatives the Government would support in terms of its Strategic Social Plan, as Government is looking at having Family Resource Centers/Social Services, etc. available in rural communities. Mr.

Elliot [trustee] asked what restrictions will the current NESS status place on the Board? For example, if the Board decided to put a K-9 school in Lawn what is the point of discussing this motion if the Department can not entertain this change in light of the current NESS status that gave Lawn a K-12 school. Minister Foote confirmed that Lawn still has NESS status and this will remain so until legislation changes. If the Board has given this thorough review and determined this is what is in the best interest of the students, the Department will have to entertain this. A legal opinion obtained by Mr. Lockyer deems the legislation would have to be changed to alter Lawn's current NESS status. (Board Minutes, March 2, 2001)

Some School Board members felt that the Community Learning Center could operate as a K-9 system and that the high school students could be bussed to St. Lawrence. On March 8, 2001 an emergency meeting of the School Board was called to discuss the Lawn situation.

Marcus Evans [trustee] indicated the Board should indicate to the Department the Board's desire to make Lawn a top priority, and the configuration of the Lawn school, and a decision on whether students should be bussed to St. Lawrence, or whether they should be housed in a K-12 school. In reference to other schools in the District, restructuring, past and present, the rationale to have single K-12 schools has been applied, and in his opinion St. Lawrence/Lawn is no different. He is in support of a K-9 system for Lawn. Margaret Witherall agreed with Marcus Evan's comments and asked that some consideration be given to the students of St. Lawrence, the rationale for making the decisions in the District, and the impact on both groups of students from Lawn and St. Lawrence. The Director replied that in looking at the next five years for Lawn students there is no doubt both St. Lawrence and Lawn students can receive a quality education. The difference in the reorganization in the Eastern Zone was economies of scale, with hundreds of students being brought together and expanded programs being offered. The impact of combining St. Lawrence and Lawn would add two teachers to the school. There is an opportunity for this board to look at education differently in light of current research on ages 0 - 4 development, and in light of the Minister's focus on age zero to the grave. The Board should focus on all parts of the District, in light of the government's focus on Family Resource Centers and the direction of the Strategic Social Plan. (Board Minutes: March 8, 2001)

At this meeting the Director presented a discussion paper on "The Long Term Educational

Plan for the Community of Lawn” which had been prepared by the Board’s administration team. Among other things the paper discussed instructional issues associated with Holy

Name of Mary Academy:

In considering the instructional issues associated with the school at Lawn, it is necessary to define what we identify as a quality education. A quality education is one in which:

- 1) Students are able to avail of a program of studies which meets or exceeds the Provincial Government graduation requirements.
- 2) The program of studies meets or exceeds student and parent expectations.
- 3) The achievement level of students meets or exceeds the provincial norm.
- 4) The program of studies provides students opportunity for access to all post secondary institutions.
- 5) The school is staffed with qualified teachers who are able to deliver the instructional program to the students.
- 6) Students have the opportunity to undertake in a variety of co/extra curricular activities.

Having reviewed the current and four year proposed program offerings for Holy Name of Mary Academy, the following summary statements are offered:

- 1) The current and proposed programs of study for Holy Name of Mary Academy exceeds the Grade twelve graduation requirements.
- 2) Based on the support of the Town of Lawn, as well as its school council (which includes parent and student representation), it is evident that the current and proposed program offerings meet or exceed parent and student expectations.
- 3) After careful analysis of the most recent testing results, the conclusion is that the achievement level of the students at Holy Name of Mary Academy exceeds the provincial norm.
- 4) Based on an analysis of the entrance requirements for Memorial University of Newfoundland, College of the North Atlantic, the Marine Institute, and Private Colleges, graduates of Holy Name of Mary Academy meet all entrance requirements subject to their achievement level. (Board Minutes, March 8, 2001)

When the discussion and questions had been finalized, the Chairman invited a motion, forwarded and seconded by two other board trustees, that “We approach the Minister of

Education requesting a K-12 system in Lawn and based on the dilapidated condition of the existing building, replace that building” (Board Minutes, March 8, 2001). The motion was carried.

On April 11, 2001, the Minister of Education, Honorable Judy Foote, announced the construction of a new school for the community of Lawn. The text of this announcement opens Chapter 1 of this thesis. I recorded my reactions to this momentous event in my personal journal:

I was teaching Theater Arts 2200 class when someone knocked on the door and said that I was wanted in the main lobby. Leaving the classroom door open, I immediately headed toward the lobby because I feared that some circumstance needed my immediate attention. As I walked the short distance down the corridor, I could see the serious looking face of our School Board representative, Mr. Bill Lockyer. I said, “What’s wrong?” Instantly, the frown turned into a smile and he said, “The Minister just announced the construction of a new K-12 school for Lawn”. It was like New Year’s Eve at the turn of the millennium. I turned and saw that several of my students were peering around the classroom door, and I cheerfully shouted, “We are getting a new school” and thus the commotion began. Leaving both the principal and the board representative in the lobby, I ran from one classroom to the next joyfully exclaiming the new school news. Within minutes the quiet spring afternoon had transformed into a jubilant and historical day. (Personal journal, May, 2001)

#### **My Personal Story: The Perspective of a Teacher and Administrator**

With the 1990’s consolidation movement, my personal struggle had become more intense for now I was faced with segregating my loyalties to the local school community, as a resident and parent, from my loyalties to my employer as a teacher and vice-principal working for the Burin Peninsula School Board in the community school at Lawn.

My own personal belief in the strengths of the small rural school had intensified.

Based on both personal experience and professional research, I was convinced that the Lawn school system was indeed an effective learning environment recognizing and nurturing the needs of the whole child. Academically, students were very successful; empirical evidence arose from results of Provincial Criterion Reference Tests, Canadian Test of Basic Skills, and the Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation Assessment. Course offerings, percentage of graduates per student population, and percentage of student body who attended and successfully completed post secondary studies were high. The school offered a host of extra-curricular activities, had many community volunteers, a qualified and dedicated staff, and an outstanding student body that could boast a near zero percent discipline problem. The school offered a comprehensive sphere of community services including a pre-school program and an adult basic education program. The underlying aims, goals, and objectives of the Government's education reform were to improve the quality of education. At Holy Name of Mary Academy in Lawn, education reform had been an ongoing process since the early 1970 consolidation attempts; an effective school was the most basic requirement of school survival.

It was my considered opinion that the Lawn school had all the attributes necessary for a safe and successful learning environment. I did not believe then or do not believe now that larger schools are necessarily cheaper to operate than smaller schools nor do I believe that the quality of a good education is necessarily linked to a large school. In calculating the financial costs of education, bureaucrats may need to also consider the costs to society of one just one student dropout. In the previous consolidation move to St. Lawrence, the 1980-81 records indicate that of the fifty-eight students from Grades Nine to Eleven who were bussed to St. Lawrence that year, thirteen students dropped out and seventeen failed for a failure/drop-out

rate of fifty-two percent. I suspected that given the history of the Lawn school situation, a high dropout rate could once again repeat itself if the Lawn students were to be transferred into St. Lawrence. As an educator, I was very concerned about a move which could possibly jeopardize the lives of even one of my students. As a parent, I was not willing to take that risk with my own son's high school education.

Orr (1992) concludes that essential to providing an effective school environment, whether large or small, is a student's 'sense of place':

All persons, scholars and lay persons alike, need to develop a more active understanding of place, including an intentional involvement with place. Attending to place and the interrelationships between all of its parts comprised the fundamental work of living "sustainability". "Good inhabitation" contrasts with mere "residing". The former requires "detailed knowledge of a place....and a sense of care and rootedness," whereas the latter requires only "cash and a map" (Orr, 1992: 130). He demonstrates that some people achieve a deep connection with a place, while others merely pass through (albeit potentially for a duration of many years). Those who establish a deep connection, in Hummon's (1990) and Perin's (1997) conceptions, may define their identity through that place (p. 80).

The physical setting of the school, the school rituals, the school curriculum and other school activities all contributed to the school as a sense of place for the community. I believed strongly that the Lawn school provided a 'sense of place', a 'rootedness', an 'identity' for the students and for the residents of Lawn and I also feared that school consolidation for Lawn would eventually lead to the demise of yet another rural Newfoundland community. The annual Christmas concert depicts to some degree at least the connection between school and community. I recorded my reflections of this year's concert in my personal journal:

Although the school structure itself is presently in a state of disrepair, when

beautifully decorated for the Christmas concert, the main lobby is transformed into an ambiance of peace and tranquility. Students are excited to see the first snowflakes being hung from the ceiling. While the janitor begins arranging the Christmas lights around the hallway, the teachers start playing Christmas music on the small stereo which will sit in the corner of the lobby for the remainder of the term. Students from Grades K - 12 will participate in the annual Christmas concert. It is a long standing tradition that the Grade 12 students will end the performance with the Nativity scene. So, dressed as angels, shepherds, and kings, all grade 12 students proudly walk, with candles in hand, through the crowded gym toward the manger waiting on the stage. A minute before in the corridor they had been moving to the sounds of Destiny's Child. The old folks would say that they were 'gailin', but in a moment's notice they have taken on an air of seriousness and a voice of confidence and beauty. Each parent sitting in the audience watches the performance with an emotional awareness that this performance is the group's last Christmas concert. The cameras flash and the video tapes roll and someone says, "Make sure you get a good picture because they will need one for the graduation slide presentation". It is a process - a movement from Kindergarten to grade twelve in which the young actors on stage have been educated and influenced by the members of the entire community. I take several pictures of my own daughter because I am scrap booking her last year of high school - a gift to be presented on graduation day. I realize that a few parents had other commitments tonight so I take a few pictures of their children as well because I know they would be here if they could. The substitute teacher sitting next to me says, "I hate to see that class leave". She made a deep connection with them while substituting in their grade nine year. She had a diabetic attack in their class that year which invoked an empathic response from the students. At the year's end they gave the teacher a plaque naming her the "Best Substitute", and for the next two years the class canvassed for the Diabetic Association. As I listen to the wonderful sounds of the young men harmonizing on stage, I am aware that I am listening to a group of young people who are not music students and, with the exception of four, are not even drama students - but they are students who have a 'sense of place'; who understand the meaning of being an individual and a player in the group; who have lived community their entire lives. They are holding on to a school and community tradition which makes them feel confident and proud - what greater gifts can education bestow upon eighteen year olds who are about to encounter the winds of change? (Personal journal, December, 2001)

Yet, despite what I, and others in the community, felt about educating the students

of Lawn, the Burin Peninsula School Board was operating within an education reform agenda which promoted school consolidation throughout the entire province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I was in a double bind throughout this period torn between two sets of values both of which were important to me on both a personal and academic level. Unofficially, many of my colleagues on the Peninsula supported Lawn's struggle. Officially, educators were very cautious in their public statements regarding the Lawn situation.

Shortly after the new non-denominational school board had been elected, School Board officials made a scheduled visit to Holy Name of Mary Academy. We were informed that the visit was to assess the school's strengths and weaknesses. My journal recorded the emotional tension generated by this visit:

As we toured the school, I began talking about the strengths of this small school and about the strengths of small schools in general. I was attempting to explain the importance of the school to community. The harder I tried to convey my message, the less of the message was being received, and the more heated the discussion became. It escalated to the point where I said, "So we can talk about anything on small schools today as long as we don't talk about their strengths". I was pointedly told, and perhaps rightfully so, that I was out of line. I, of course, felt that I had a solid knowledge of small schools based on parenting, work experience, and research, and, in my naivete I thought that the meeting would identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The incident ended on a peculiar note, the person with whom I had been debating hugged me before leaving the school.

I cannot remember that moment in time without connecting education and politics. It was an awakening for me to the larger context of the Lawn school system within the new boundaries of education on the Burin Peninsula and indeed within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Government's educational reform legislated the establishment of school councils for all schools, and I became an elected teacher representative on Holy Name of

Mary Academy's School Council whose self-appointed mission was to maintain a community school in Lawn. During the 1990s, the School Council worked endlessly writing briefs, contacting government officials, and presenting the school's cause at public education forums. My challenge was to ride the fine line between parental activism and loyalty to my school board. My saving grace was that my personal beliefs in the educational potential which exists in effective small schools was supported in the research literature on rural education. Thus, I focused on researching rural education and on connecting that research to the small rural school in Lawn. My parental activism was grounded in educational theory.

#### **Reflections and Ruminations**

The brief presented to the Burin Peninsula School Board on January 9, 2001 from Holy Name of Mary Academy's School Council was entitled, *A New Center of Learning for the Community of Lawn - A Pilot Project*. It proposed among other things "that the community re-think their concept of a rural school - moving beyond the limited boundaries which exist at present, for society's needs have changed and the rural school must adapt to meet those changes" (p. 6). Along with encapsulating the main theme behind the Lawn proposal for a new K-12 school, the statement in many ways symbolizes the change which occurred in the Lawn school consolidation struggle from the 1980's movement to the 1990's era. The negotiated consolidation movement of the 1990's differed from the 1980's in that it involved a "rethinking", "a moving beyond the limited boundaries" of picket lines and public protests over school closure. It involved strategic planning and school improvement initiatives. It involved cooperating with school board administration and building school

community and it involved building an academic success story. Over a period of time, the voices of the Lawn people regarding community schooling struggled to be heard, to be recognized, and to be respected regarding their beliefs on community schooling. The duration of their efforts allowed them to reach a point in time when the political structures were such that legislated school councils and elected board representative would be in a position to give a significant, authoritative, and systematic approach to their cries for community schooling. Yet, the key essential to the ongoing struggle and eventual success was indeed the community's continued unity and passion regarding their school. Without this community drive and passion it seems reasonable to suggest that there would have been little strength and authority in the voices of the school board representative and the school council. The strength and authority evolved from the support of a rural community working together to attain the educational goals they had envisioned for their children. Their success was rooted in the struggle of past generations of Lawn people who persisted in their efforts and who were bound and determined to be heard. This is not just a story of the Lawn people - this is a story of rural people struggling to be heard, remaining united in a cause, and attaining the seemingly unattainable. It is a peopled story, a political story, and a visionary story.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EXPERIENCE IS EDUCATION

The storying that has occurred in this thesis has been personally educative on a number of levels. Not only have I come to understand political processes in a new way, but I have also lived through the learning of a new research paradigm, that of narrative inquiry. I have come to revision the Lawn story and also to understand myself as a narrative researcher.

#### **The Lawn Story Re-vised**

An established school system has existed in Lawn since 1862 and over time the school became entrenched in the cultural values of the people and it became the heart of the community.

A heart is central to the life of the body; it establishes its rhythm and pulse. Through the circulatory system, it is connected to all parts of the body and must pump with sufficient energy to send blood through the entire system. The heart is interdependent with all other major body organs making oxygenation and nourishment possible and thereby sustaining and repairing and restoring. Blood returns to the heart for more nutrients yet it also serves to nourish the heart itself. The heart is controlled by electrical impulses which are a function of both internal and external conditions. Rushes of adrenalin cause it to beat stronger; illness and stress alter its rhythm. The interior structure of the heart contains four chambers, all with different roles to play - of receiving, of holding, of energizing, of sending. The heart is the universal symbol of love, compassion and caring. (Dunne, 1998, p. 230)

As the heart sustains the human body, the school in Lawn sustains the life of the community. It energizes and nourishes the community because it is a place of pride, of hope, of opportunity, and of success for community residents. The school is interdependent with the

life of the community because, as was suggested by the school council in a brief presented to the Burin Peninsula School Board in 1997, Bryant and Grady's (1990) principles of centripetalism, inclusiveness, and distinctiveness apply to the school in Lawn.

The school plays a central role in nurturing a sense of place and belonging in the lives of the local people. Residents' stories demonstrate that it is a community center for the residents and community organizations, individuals, and businesses confer belonging, prestige, and reputation upon Holy Name of Mary Academy. Social identity in Lawn is a community matter and school activities provide an opportunity for community events which members of the community can and do attend. In the early years, community events such as "The Blessing of the Fleet" or "The Crowning of Mary" were interconnected with the school through the organizational skills of the teachers and the unanimous participation of the students and citizens. In the later years, school events such as Christmas concerts, sports events, drama productions, and graduation ceremonies became an essential part of community life. The school exists as part of the town's distinction and identity; held together by common beliefs and values, and a sense of ownership. The community supports the school and the school supports the community. This relationship developed over a span of forty-five years and was perhaps born out of the constant struggle by community residents to maintain their community school. The school in Lawn is a place where children learn, where community gathers, and where a deep-rooted community relationship surfaced and continues to resurface with each passing year.

In retrospect, I have come to understand the story of the people of Lawn and their struggle to maintain community schooling over a period of forty-five years as a 'sacred story'

as Crites(1971) describes it.

...these stories seem to be elusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully and directly told, because they lie so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness of a people to be directly told: they form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly aware... Such stories, and the symbolic worlds they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling places. People live in them. Yet even though they are not directly told, even though a culture seems rather to be the telling than the teller of these stories, their form seems to be narrative. (p.295)

In the various battles to protect the community school, the Lawn residents were living their sacred story. They were acting out of an implicit sense of rootedness to the earth and reaffirming their sense of place, identity, and belonging.

The deep rooted human connection to the community school gave voice and authority to the Lawn residents regarding school consolidation - first, in the early years of the struggle, through the voices of individual residents; then, later, through the voices of the organized parent groups who were representing community members; and finally and most recently, through the officially legislated school councils and school board trustees, and the various town councils. Through organized and determined resistance to protect their sacred story, the Lawn residents eventually authored their own school story.

The movement began in the late 1950's, when the parish priest spoke on behalf of the Lawn people regarding the best possible education for their children. It was his singular voice that first introduced school consolidation to the community of Lawn. In the 1960's, a few local people began speaking out collectively on school consolidation issues and the tension began to mount between the local school authorities and the people of Lawn. By the 1970's the people had organized themselves, in an independent way, into non-authorized, informal

groups who organized public protests and who kept their children out of school to protest school closure. By the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's, parents were organized into School Improvement Committees and Concerned Parents Groups and these voices began to take on an authority that captured the attention of school officials as resistance to school consolidation persisted. During this period as well, the voices of the people could be heard through elected representation on the local school board and through the local town council. In the 1990's, the voices of the Lawn people began to be heard through the official government legislated frameworks of school councils. It was, in fact, these officially legislated political structures that gave authority to the voices of the people. Over the years into the 1990's, as people became better educated, as well as more experienced in political process, they developed a political astuteness and adopted activist strategies of letter writing, brief presentations, and academic research to give authority to their voices and to give resolution to their story.

Yet, while the rural sacred story guided the actions of the Lawn people, it conflicted with the social and economic perspectives of a chain of various external school authorities, both local and provincial. The perspectives of these individuals was shaped by the political and social stories of the larger society. The governance story promoted school consolidation, evolving as it did from urban principles and the culturally accepted concepts of economies of scale, 'bigger is better', and centralization. For governing organizations, the Lawn story was a regional story, not a community story. However, for the people of Lawn the story was anything but a regional story. It was a deeply personal story of identity, of a sense of place, of rootedness to the earth. It was a story of life.

Much tension developed between the two stories that were being told simultaneously in this particular rural location. The tension peaked at various points throughout the years, yet was not resolved until the provincial government recognized officially the unique nature of rural schooling in the Ministerial Panel on Education Delivery in the Classrooms of Newfoundland and Labrador(2000), an acknowledgment which proved to be foundational to Minister Foote's decision in 2001 to build a new school in Lawn.

The stage has now been set for a new school story; one that envisions not only a K - 12 school system, but a school system envisioned to become a center of learning for the entire community - a facility that plans to incorporate the current technological advances of the modern society into a traditional small school setting in order to create an educational environment that will reap the benefits of both worlds. The announcement of a new K-12 school for Lawn turned the tides on the old school story and for Lawn residents a new school story is about to begin.

Over the years from 1956 to 2001, government policies, school authorities, and local people changed, but with each generation the school consolidation struggle continued. Immutable in the debate over school consolidation movement was the resilient determination of the Lawn people to maintain their community school. It was this strength and determination that allowed the people to reach a point where their story would come full circle.

If experience is education (Dewey, 1938), then this story can be viewed as an education in the political growth of rural residents to the point where there occurred a shift of authority and the external voices of school authorities and the internal voices of local

people became equalized. At present in the community of Lawn, the provincial government, the Burin Peninsula School Board, the administration and school council of Holy Name of Mary Academy, and the Town of Lawn are working in unison on a vision of education that will tap into the community's strengths, and will expand its educational boundaries to meet the life long learning needs of the entire community. In reshaping rural education in Lawn, the focus is to concentrate on the present educational needs of the community by building on the strengths of rural education and by creating a culture of continuous learning in a modern facility within that community.

In Lawn, the thrust was to stay rooted to the community, to resist school consolidation, and rather, with the use of technology to bring the world into the community. So in a sense, the Lawn school, through this exposure to the global world, is also continuing to transform itself - extending and expanding, but continuing to treasure its sacred story.

### **Reflections and Ruminations**

The writing of my thesis has been an uncovering of layers and layers of meaning regarding a rural people and their community school. It has moved me toward an understanding of the tension between the school authorities and the local people, as well as, an understanding of the story's impact upon my own existence. The writing of this thesis provoked a deep reflection into the multiple layers of what to me, initially, was simply another case of rural school consolidation. By entering into the experiences of all players in the drama I came to realize the depth of the issue and the deep rooted passion of all of the players within it.

Moving through narrative research, I have discovered that learning occurred in the constant storying and re-storying of the events, in the searching to find understanding, and in the questions that continually resurfaced. I was compelled to ask myself why I needed to tell this story; why I needed to understand the multiple layers of its existence; and why I needed to seek resolution to the experience. Storying to make meaning requires entering into the complexity of the multiple and lived moments of peoples' lives; into the complexity of multiple ways of knowing; into the complexity of multiple ways of understanding. A narrative journey is a journey of experience - an awakening to the vast complexities of human experience; an energy that can sustain a way of life.

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