

Interview with Dr. A.W. Mooney in July 1987 regarding the establishment of the College, published in: Reminiscences 1968-1978, compiled by Ann Howard. Prince George BC: College of New Caledonia, 1988. vi, 361 p. (CNC Commemorative History Series Vol. 2). pp. 1-9. This book is available in CNC Library Archives.

1

Dr. A.W. Mooney



[This statement was prepared by Dr. Mooney based on an interview conducted at CNC in July 1987]

To understand the creation of the College of New Caledonia, one needs to know some of the preceding events in education in British Columbia.

Education was a priority responsibility for the provinces under the British North America Act. This was the basic governing act until our recent acquisition of a constitution. The provincial government in B.C. had created a Ministry or Department of Education. The Department of Education set up School Boards in any area of the province with enough children, usually 8 or 9, to have a functioning school. The School Board was responsible for providing a school facility and a teacher to carry on instruction of the students according to a curriculum set forth by the Department of Education. As a result, in the Cariboo, Central Interior and the Peace River area there were a great many small schools, each with its own School Board. This arrangement persisted through the depression and war years.

By the postwar era some centres had grown considerably. The Department commissioned Mr. Cameron, an Educator, to examine the system and make recommendations. This resulted in the Cameron Report of 1946. The report recommended the establishment of larger

school districts, based on those centres which had grown to reasonable dimensions. Most of the smaller, and mostly one-room schools, were closed down and busing began. Thus there were the following school districts - Smithers, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Prince George, McBride, Quesnel and Williams Lake. When referring to these communities therefore one is referring not to the one community, but to a district of major dimensions. Places such as Chetwynd, Valemount, Mackenzie, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake, Houston and Granisle existed but were not centres as of today and incorporated as individual municipalities.

The trustees of School Districts gathered annually to discuss problems common to them all. Thus there was the B.C.S.T.A. - British Columbia School Trustees' Association. This association had subdivisions. The area from Smithers to McBride and north to Fort St. John and later Fort Nelson and south to Williams Lake was one such division. This division also held regular meetings in various centres in the district. Most centres were experiencing considerable growth in economic activity and population. People were congenial, faced similar problems and were co-operative in solving these problems.

In British Columbia there was a system which had evolved first into an 8-grade elementary school and then a 3-year high school program. If one finished the program and passed the provincially set examination, one was said to have completed Junior Matriculation. Later, in the late 1920's, the new program of 6 years elementary school, 3 years junior high school and 3 years senior high school was established and later a further change was made to 7 years elementary, 3 years junior high school and 2 years senior high school with Junior Matriculation being awarded. Along with this arrangement persons having completed Junior Matriculation could either go on to first year university and then into second year university. Or, if enough students were available and interested, a school board could offer first year university courses of a limited variety and the student could complete Senior Matriculation, and then if so desiring, could proceed to second year university. Prince George was one centre which provided a Senior Matriculation program.

The school trustees of the Central and Northern Interior became concerned about the opportunities of their students to proceed to



further educational levels and consequent occupational opportunities. The high cost of going to university was also of concern, as was the necessity for the young people to be so far away from home and home influence. An additional difficulty was the tendency of these young people after completing their education to be lost to the communities of their origins and at the same time these communities had difficulty recruiting trained personnel - usually having to pay higher incomes than the Lower Mainland communities.

Thus was born the drive to start a college in our own region. A committee was set up with representation from the School Boards of the Central Interior. This included Mrs. Knoerr of Smithers, Mrs. Haggerty of Burns Lake, Dr. A.W. Mooney of Vanderhoof, Mrs. Kellett of Prince George and also Mr. Sabiston and Mr. Westover of Quesnel and Mr. Yorkson of Williams Lake and Mr. Henderson, pharmacist in McBride.

Dr. Mooney of Vanderhoof represented School District #56. Vanderhoof was one of many school districts forming the Northern Division of the B.C. School Trustees' Association. At association meetings the problems of post-secondary education for students in the north was discussed. One problem was that although the B.C. government, in co-operation with the federal government, had built vocational schools, facilities were needed to accommodate the rapidly increasing number of students who wanted technical or academic education. A committee with representation from each school board was created. Dr. Mooney was elected Chairman. Their goal was to establish a post-secondary education facility in Prince George.

The first step for the committee was to send out questionnaires to businesses to find out if a college would be supported. The college would offer technical training, academic courses, upgrading for employed people who needed further training, and would aid persons with little education to bring their education up to higher levels. The committee hoped for co-operation between the college and the B.C. Vocational School. The response from the community was encouraging.

There were many post-secondary colleges in the United States. One was near Seatac Airport between Seattle and Tacoma. The committee contacted this college to examine such an institution in action. The

Principal later came to Prince George to tell a public meeting how a college functioned.

In Alberta, the University of Alberta at Edmonton supervised a number of other post-secondary institutions. Dr. Johns, the President, responded to the committee's invitation and came to Prince George to meet with the committee and speak to the public on how colleges could develop post-secondary education. His visit was very helpful. At Fort William-Port Arthur, Ontario was setting up such a college which would later be able to offer degree programs.

We had a meeting with Mr. Peterson, Minister of Education. This meeting was held at the Vocational School. He was favourable to the undertaking but nothing happened for several months.

Because of the rapid expansion of U.B.C., Victoria College and the influx of students from outside of British Columbia, the Department of Education had set up an Academic Board under the direction of Dean Chant. The Board was to rule on equivalency of courses offered and of courses completed.

While in Vancouver on other matters, I decided to contact Dean Chant. We had a meeting at his residence and Dean Chant was very interested in the objectives of the committee. Later he and his assistant, Mr. Franklin, came to Prince George. Central B.C. Airlines, under the direction of Mr. Russ Baker, put their Grumman Goose amphibious plane at our disposal without charge. The visitors were met at the airport in Prince George. It was interesting to me to have to evade a moose on the road up from the CNR bridge on the way to the airport. We were taken to Fort St. James where the plane landed on the lake, then moved out onto an apron of concrete downtown. Later we visited Mackenzie which was in a state of construction. Next we passed over Granisle where the mine was being developed and then on to Smithers and Telkwa. Time was becoming short and we did not land at the airport but continued to pass over Burns Lake, the Endako development and Fraser Lake, Vanderhoof and on to Prince George. The trip up to Prince George had passed over Williams Lake and Quesnel. Unfortunately we were unable to visit the McBride district.

The trip by Dean Chant soon bore results. Mr. Peterson advised us to form a council, which we did. Several very prominent persons were



added to the committee. They included Mayor Moffat of Prince George and Mr. Sam Evans, Chief Engineer for B.C. Telephone in Northern B.C.

A referendum was held. Williams Lake had dropped out of the program. Districts were to participate in financing the college program. Unfortunately, although the referendum had an overall majority, Quesnel had not passed the referendum. The question then was, would we proceed.

Mr. Sam Evans had been elected Chairman of the council. Mr. Galt Wilson was a member also. Mr. Evans, Mr. Wilson and myself went to Victoria. Our flight to Vancouver was delayed and we missed our connection to Victoria. We hired a private plane which aside from the pilot could accomodate 3 passengers. The plane defied the regulations and at an opportune moment crossed the main runways and moved into position for take off. After a reprimand, the pilot was given permission and took off. We arrived at the Department of Education where we were greeted by the Deputy Minister. He was previously a professional at U.B.C. There was considerable discussion. The department was disturbed that Quesnel had failed the referendum. Finally permission was given to proceed with the college establishment, but with only a half-hearted encouragement by the Deputy Minister who indicated the responsibility or success was up to the council, not the department.

We returned. We were confident a college could be started. No facilities, no staff, no property and only half-hearted department support.

Fortunately the referendum had included permission for districts to assist financially. Now the support of Mayor Moffat and the Prince George School Board became important.

A public meeting was held at the Simon Fraser Hotel. After some discussion Bishop Fergus O'Grady proved what a great man he was. He told the audience that Prince George College was basically a high school and the most it could offer was Senior Matriculation.

Mr. Sam Evans as Chairman provided administrative guidance. He had indicated support to me quite early for a college. This was when we met in Vancouver a year or two previously. His election as Chairman was valuable as he was someone from outside of the education and trustee establishment.

The Prince George School Board agreed to the college using the senior secondary school facilities after hours as a location for classes. The library of the college was permitted upon the mezzanine area of the High School library. A trailer was rented and set up near the school on the west side. This was to serve as an administration facility. Mr. Franke was hired as Principal. He organized a curriculum and teachers were hired. That autumn classes began and as usual when the student body is not large, the conditions difficult, the coming together as an effective group resulted.

Unfortunately, Mr. Franke's public relations were not the best. There too was the movement at the time among young people to take control of education facilities. They organized a student parade. Mr. Franke showed his ability and dealt with the situation very positively and any threat disappeared and the college was in full control by the council and staff.

Mr. Cook was Principal of the Vocational School. He was co-operative. Mr. White was the Director of the Vocational Schools for the Province of British Columbia. He was reluctant to meld the Vocational School in Prince George with the college. This however was a firm objective of the council. Mr. Franke resigned after the first year of operation and Dr. Speckeen became the new Principal. After the first year of operation Quesnel opted to join the college region.

Later the department agreed to the amalgamation of the College and the Vocational School. The department realized the College was for real and that the projected regional area was intact. Now the College had a vocational component, but more important, a proper building for day use and grounds for expansion. More government support came. Mr. Phillipson, when he became Deputy Minister, was most supportive, particularly in financing additional new buildings. He had been school inspector out of Prince George when the college movement began. He was succeeded by Mr. Dave Todd as Superintendent in Prince George and he too was a great help.

One group which had given great support to the College committee was the University Women's Club. Because of the many new ventures being developed in the region people were coming from many areas of Canada and the United States and beyond. The members of the



Women's Club had degrees from the most varied centres of Education. I was glad I had faced a difficult and hazardous trip from Vanderhoof to Prince George to meet with them on one occasion.

The committee which brought the College into being had very specific objectives:

1. There was no variation in the choice of Prince George for the location, being central to the Districts involved.
2. There should be a subsidy for students having to travel to Prince George and live there. This applied to those more than 25 miles from the College.
3. There would be amalgamation of the College with the Vocational School.
4. There would be educational programs, vocational, technical, university transfer (academic) and night school or continuing education programs which would be coordinated with local District programs.
5. An opportunity for so-called mature students who were of good academic capability, but who had not completed high school or previously Junior Matriculation, to try college courses and if successful to continue their education without penalty.
6. That School Districts would be prepared to participate in College financing to give them a right to express an opinion about performance.

The College Council was initially very representative and totally non-political. The Minister set up the way the Council was to be formed.

1. A representative from each School Board participating.
2. The Council of Public Education, the Cabinet in session with the Lieutenant Governor to appoint two members. These were Mr. Harold Moffat and Dr. Al Mooney.
3. Department of Education appoint a School Superintendent from the region. Mr. Dave Todd was the first. The intent was to maintain coordination between the College and the public school program.

4. Each Board to submit three names from their District to the Department and the Department would select one from each District to be on the Council.

The Council was thus able to reflect all aspects of the communities forming the College District and also the Government and Department of Education.

Mr. Peterson was an excellent Minister of Education. When he was transferred to be Attorney General, Mr. Brothers of Trail became the Minister of Education. He too was very capable and supported the College. The other early College was Selkirk of Castlegar in Mr. Brothers' area.

Formation of a College Council was changed through the years. After Highway #16 was completed through to McBride, that District was amalgamated with Prince George District. When the Government placed a College in Terrace, Smithers was transferred to that region. No longer is a School Superintendent placed on the Council and School Boards do not have direct representation on the Council.

These changes I think have to some degree weakened the local relationship to the College.

A further change which has diminished regional influence was to discontinue District Boards' participation in College financing. This removes their right to properly express their wishes for the College development. In addition there is a new Government Ministry for post-secondary education.

Although there have been these changes, there is still complete support for the College in the region and there has always been the desire for the College to be able to give a full program of the technologies and also to progress to degree-granting in various areas as time passes.

Finally, one has to give thanks to Mr. Mac Carpenter for his work as Treasurer in the early time of the committee, council and college. This he did without remuneration and beyond his duties to the Prince George School Board.



Much of the new building program was achieved during the tenure as Chairman of the Council by Mr. Findlay Dingwall. Mr. Des Parker did much good work as Architect.

Students, however, are always the life blood of an educational facility. The students of CNC have always been first rate. The Council encouraged the formation of a student organization. The students appointed representatives to Council. They did not have a vote but could speak to Council and help in the formation of decisions and could present student problems to the Council.

To be Chairman of the Committee and a member of the Council was a great gift to me. When I visit C.N.C. I am overwhelmed by the awareness of what has resulted from our efforts of twenty years ago.

The present Principal, Mr. Charles McCaffray, is doing a marvellous job of managing the College through its expansion in the face of economic restrictions, and he has a positive vision for its future.

[By separate mail, Dr. Mooney provided us with a copy of the College Financial Statements as of April 30, 1970, which includes a list of participating school districts and the contribution to be made by each. Dr. Mooney notes that "this is how our College was started and financed. It was homegrown and home-financed and we had considerable local direction and authority as a result." The report has been added to the CNC Archives collection and is available for reference.]