

Pioneer Women Worth Recognition: The Impacts of the Beattie Sisters' Role in Education in
British Columbia

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Unless you attended one of the two schools named in honor of the Beattie sisters as a student or as a faculty member, it is not likely that you would have heard of the Beattie sisters or their story as a family of female teachers and the impacts that their dedication to teaching had on education in British Columbia. Education is continuously changing and has developed and progressed in many diverse ways throughout global history. These changes have varied in different parts of the world over time, and if you were to look at what the education systems looked like during a specific time period, it would greatly depend on the culture and context of the region being assessed. The Beattie sisters are a family of five female sisters, all of who became teachers in one setting or another and contributed to the education system in British Columbia. Although the Beattie sisters were born in Ireland, their true impacts were made on Canadian soil, and were first initiated in the city of Kamloops in 1893. As a student myself of Beattie Elementary School, my fellow students and I had heard of the Beattie sisters, but mostly only as a way of keeping our adolescent minds entertained through stories of their ghosts haunting the school's hallways at night. However, when I reflect to my elementary school years, I feel grateful to have had such a supportive learning environment and I believe I owe some credit to the women that made that possible. The purpose of this paper is to reveal the story of a

group of strong, dedicated, and hard-working female sisters, that deserve recognition for their role in the history of education. The Beattie sisters' implementation of private education, dedication to educating, and will to push gender discrimination left memorable impacts on many children of the Thompson-Okanagan.



Unknown. "Beattie Family." KMA: Beattie Family collection 1973.099, 9040.

The Beattie sisters moved to Kamloops, British Columbia from the small town of Dalkey in Ireland with their immediate family in 1893, likely initiated by a career opportunity for their father, Martin Beattie.¹ Together, Martin and Jane Beattie had five daughters by the names of Elizabeth (Lily), Emily, Harriette, Florence, and Mabel, as well as a son named John. All five of the female siblings would become teachers in one way or another throughout their life in British Columbia. The rise of the educational impacts that the sisters would go on to achieve began only 10 days after the Beattie family's arrival to the new country. The eldest daughter, Lily, announced that she would be opening a private school in August of that year in the community

¹ Unknown, "Enderby Teacher Guided Three Generations Through School", Newspaper Article, KMA Family File, Kamloops.

of Kamloops.² During the late 1800's and early 1900's, private schools were becoming increasingly more common, as it provided parents with the option for their children to receive a "British" or superior education outside of the public-school system.³ Lily received an education at the Royal University of Ireland and studied teaching, however, she did not complete a degree.⁴ Lily took it upon herself to feel confident in her abilities to teach and opened "Kamloops Select School" that was run through the Beattie family home on the 100 block of Lansdowne Street in Kamloops during 1893.⁵



Unknown. *Miss Beattie's private school, 161 Lansdowne Street, Kamloops. Back: Miss Harriette Beattie, Alice Penzer, Margaret McLean, Tessie Belleau, Fanny Pemberton, Edith Lee, Miss Lillian Beattie. Middle: ? Penzer, Jessie Penzer, Lottie Warlow, Stuart Carment, Madge Carment. Front: Seymour Penzer, Willie Carment, Leighton Wade, Darrel Wade. KMA: (J.J. Carment collection), 2226.*

primarily run by Lily, Harriette and Mabel. In 1896 the school was changed to "Kamloops Day

² Russell Allert, "Emily Beattie's Teaching Career in Kamloops", KMA Articles, Kamloops, 1985, 3.

³ John Stewart, "The Beattie Sisters - A Family of Teachers", KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops, 1986, 1.

⁴ Allert, 3.

⁵ Stewart, 1.

and Boarding School” and the sisters began to board students from out of the Kamloops area.⁶ Due to an increased student population, the family had to move twice from its initial building to accommodate the number of children. The school ran successfully for forty years until Lily’s retirement in 1933.⁷ Although all the sisters helped with the school throughout the early years of its operations, Emily, Florence, and Mabel went on to become public school teachers. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in British Columbia, a person could teach school without attending normal school by successfully completing different levels of examinations.⁸ Once a candidate had passed the examinations, they were granted a certificate by the Council of Public Instruction.⁹ The examinations were held annually, and Kamloops was one of the cities where the exams would take place. The exams were graded by three classes of First, Second, and Third and each class was subdivided in an A or B grade.¹⁰ Emily, Florence and Mabel all received their teaching certificates which permitted them to teach in British Columbia’s public-school system, while Lily, Harriette and Mabel stayed in the public school and never went on to teach in public schools.

⁶ Stewart, 1.

⁷ Allert, 3.

⁸ Stewart, 2.

⁹ Allert, 4.

¹⁰ Allert, 4.

Although in present day British Columbia the profession as a teacher has reached a level of gender equality, it was not always that way. The Beattie sisters' story demonstrates the struggles they faced as being working women, and the efforts made in attempting to change the profession norms around gender. During the early 1900's, almost all female teachers were single as they had to choose dedication to teaching over the hopes of marriage. It was part of the Victorian era views that women who worked jobs and were married at the same time were frowned upon, which meant that if a female teacher in Canada decided to get married, she immediately gave up her career.¹¹ The table to the right from Marta Danylewycz and Alison Prentice's, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto", reflects data from a late 1800's census in Toronto, demonstrates an example of the clearly differing numbers of married and single female teachers compared to those of male teachers.¹² Not only did the Victorian morality frown upon married working women, it also negatively viewed women who did not fulfill their inherent right and obligation to marry a man and become a mother. A quote from Russell Allert's research supports these views as it states, "female teachers were regarded with

TABLE 5 Marital Status of Teachers: Four Toronto Wards 1861-1881

		Female		Male	
		No.	%	No.	%
1861	Single	42	68.9	41	56.2
	Married	8	13.1	29	39.7
	Widowed	11	18.0	3	4.1
	Total	61	100.0	73	100.0
1871	Single	77	77.0	13	31.0
	Married	10	10.0	27	64.3
	Widowed	13	13.0	2	4.8
	Total	100	100.0	42	100.1
1881	Single	133	86.4	21	38.9
	Married	10	6.5	32	59.3
	Widowed	11	7.1	1	1.9
	Total	154	100.0	54	100.1

From the Manuscript Census Returns for the City of Toronto, 1861-1881.

¹¹ Allert, 2.

¹² Alison Prentice and Marta Danylewycz, "Teachers, Gender, and Bureaucratizing School Systems in Nineteenth Century Montreal and Toronto" in *History of Education Quarterly* 24, no. 1, 1984, 75-100.

distrust, since they had given up their sacred God-given duties and wives and mothers to pursue a professional career that was normally regarded as a man's job."¹³ With these perspectives in consideration, it can be assumed that being a female teacher in Canada during these years put women in a pre-determined position of being unable to please everyone. For the Beattie family, three of the sisters remained single and chose to devote themselves to the role of teaching children. This choice shows the sisters' passion for educating, and their determination to not let gender norms take away their desire to be working members of society. For Emily Beattie, this did not discourage her. Instead, Emily pushed herself to retake her teacher's exam, and received a First-Class A certificate. Her excellence was rewarded by the Kamloops public-school system, as she was appointed first assistance to principal E. Stuart Wood, principal of Kamloops Public School.¹⁴ Although the average salary for women teachers in British Columbia around 1896 was \$618.00, Emily was paid an annual salary of \$720.00.¹⁵ During a time of unequal pay with a much greater salary for male teachers than female teachers, Emily's salary came very close to pushing those standards. On average, male teachers made \$730.00, which is only \$10.00 more than the salary that Emily Beattie was making in her position at Kamloops Public School.¹⁶ Although that was one aspect of Emily Beattie's career that was positive, being a female teacher still came with its challenges. In 1914, many people believed Emily Beattie was an "obvious choice"¹⁷ for the position of principal of the Kamloops Public School when the principal

¹³ Allert, 5.

¹⁴ Allert, 5.

¹⁵ Allert, 6.

¹⁶ Allert, 6.

¹⁷ Allert, 6.

resigned but gave the position to a less qualified man who had a negative reputation as a teacher. However, In Emily's favour, when the 1914 High School Entrance Exams came out, over half of the students failed.¹⁸ This outcome resulted in the firing of the male principal, and the hiring of Emily Beattie. Emily Beattie became the first female principal in Kamloops; again, pushing gender norms by proving that a female is just as suitable for a position of importance as her male counterpart. Unfortunately, obtaining her position of principal did not end the gender discrimination for Emily. After reporting a dispute including verbal abuse towards Emily from a janitor of the school, the School Board did nothing but inform Emily that they were sorry the incident had occurred. This form of treatment in a professional environment was not acceptable to Emily, and she took the liberty of resigning from her position and moved to Victoria, BC to teach for the remainder of her career. It is without doubt that the Beattie sisters faced gender discrimination as teachers, but their will to stand up against it is honorable.



Unknown. *Miss Beattie's School about 1910. Front row: Desmond Vicars, Allison Shotton, Jessie Brown, Harry Clements, Arvid Beadley, Albert Calhoun, Willie Clements, Clarence Johnstone, Annie Shotton, Bertram Curtis, Alma Russell. Second row: Dora Hurst, Trixie Slavin, Muriel Costley, Marguerite Curtis, Marjory Wain, Doris Costley, Marjorie Hurst, Ethel Holmes, Ruby Cameron, Helen Winterbottom, Chrissie Paxton, ???, Olive Carment. Back row: Miss Lily Beattie, Miss Harriette Beattie, Hecla Bradley, Janet Finlay, Myrille Starret, Annie Place, Daisy Turner, Blanche Calhoun, Gladys Gray, Trixie Vicars, Elsie Hollomore, Mary Pollard. KMA: 5007.*

¹⁸ Allert, 7.

Despite some of the challenges the Beattie sisters faced, the sisters taught thousands of children throughout British Columbia and their efforts left lasting impacts on the communities they served. One accomplishment that should receive credit is the success of the private school established by Lily Beattie. Although school was a regular part of life for children during this time period, the private school introduced new subjects to students, such as French, Latin, music, drawing and painting.¹⁹ It could be said that Emily Beattie also helped provide students with artistic learning abilities that they may not have received from other teachers, and she was also an artist who enjoyed painting and writing poems. Even once entering the public-school system, it has been noted that the sisters would use their own funds to provide students with resources for home economics or practical arts. For example, Mabel Beattie would provide the boys with model airplanes and the girls with sewing and embroidery materials.²⁰ In addition, the sisters taught many children who became successful members of society, obtaining jobs such as, doctors, nurses, lawyers, and teachers in towns and cities like Kamloops, Vernon, Enderby, and Victoria. This is restated as Mr. Vicars, a student of the Kamloops Select School run by the Beattie sisters shares, “The value of their teaching has resulted in many from Kamloops attaining high places in life”.²¹ In a newspaper article, it was mentioned that Mabel Beattie was remembered by some students for her generosity during the “hungry thirties”²², as she would

¹⁹ Stewart, 1.

²⁰ Unknown, “Enderby’s School Named for Teacher”, Newspaper Article, KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops.

²¹ Unknown, “Beattie School Opening Is Happy Occasion for Sisters”, Newspaper Article, Sentinel Newspaper, KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops, 1958.

²² Unknown, “Enderby’s School Named for Teacher”, Newspaper Article, KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops.

make sure that children that had to share food were fed. As well, in 1934 Mabel Beattie worked with staff for several months on the government grant that the school almost had to shut down.²³ Thanks to her some of her efforts, the school is still running today. In fact, an elementary school was opened in honor of Miss Mabel Beattie. The school is named, “M.V. Beattie School” and is still operating today. In 1957, another school was designed and named in recognition of the Beattie sisters in Kamloops; three of the sisters were able to attend the grand opening and share that they were “honored and happy”²⁴ to be present at the event. Beattie School has now become Beattie School of the Arts and is where both my older sister and I attended as students to receive our wonderful experience of elementary education.

Prior to starting my research on the Beattie sisters, I only knew about the haunting tales of their ghosts haunting the school and sharing these stories with my peers during sleepovers to try and spook each other. However, I now know that the Beattie sisters were so much more beyond the stories. The Beattie sisters were pioneers of Kamloops, who provided a successful education experience for many children of the community and surrounding areas, as well as helped shape my own education. The Beattie sisters were exceptional women, who dedicated their lives to better others despite the odds that were working against them. Their passion and devotion is something that I, as an aspiring teacher, look up to; I can only hope to make the same impacts on children within the community of Kamloops throughout my career. By introducing a public school to Kamloops, a life-long dedication to teaching, and the strength to push gender

²³ Unknown, “Enderby’s School Named for Teacher”, Newspaper Article, KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops.

²⁴ Unknown, “Enderby’s School Named for Teacher”, Newspaper Article, KMA Beattie Family File, Kamloops.

discrimination, the Beattie sisters are remembered by many students, and their memory will continue to live on through Beattie Elementary School.

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