

THE SATURDAY SCHOOL:
HOW IT BEGAN

ROBERT STAMP

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Preface

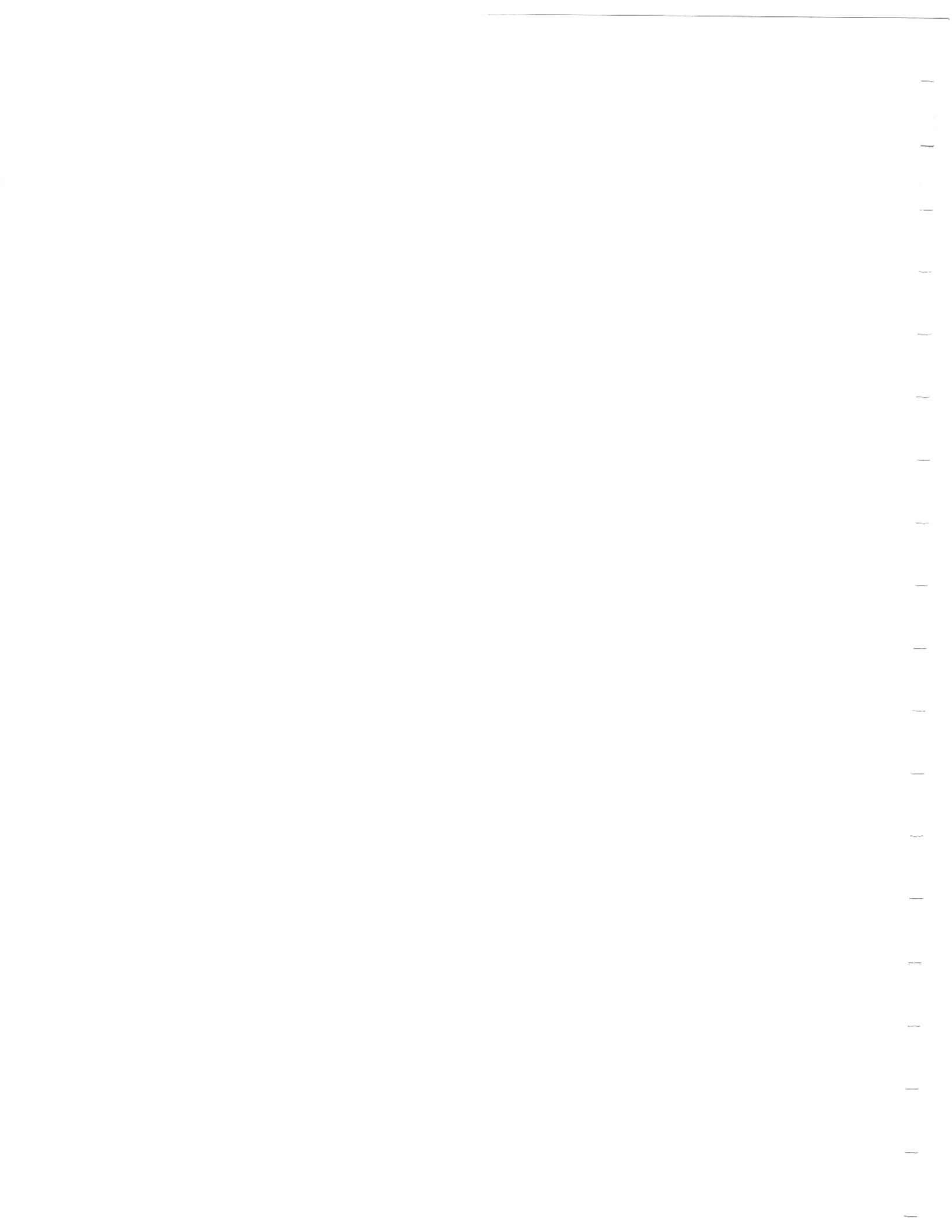
The Saturday School opened in Calgary, Alberta in September, 1972. Officially designated as a private school, and complying with private school regulations of the Alberta Department of Education, the school is unofficially regarded by its supporters as an "alternative" school, in the sense that it offers an alternative to the philosophy and methods of state-supported education. It is parent-controlled, operated by the Saturday School Society. Members of the society are local residents. The school began with 28 children ranging in age from 5 to 12 years, one full-time teacher, and a clutch of parent and university volunteers.

This is an account of the planning months: the months prior to September, during the period when the Saturday School blossomed from a beautiful idea to a practical reality. It is a record of co-operation, hard work, frustration, good times, community spirit, disorganization, and positive dedicated effort. Although the account is subjective—written as it is by a member of the group—an attempt has been made to provide a certain objective balance, primarily in the form of quotations and illustrative material.

The account is designed to serve two purposes. First, it provides a permanent record for the participants to reference in future years. Second, it provides an idea of the tasks involved in setting up an alternative school, so that other groups contemplating the possibility may have the benefit of our experience. From the beginning the members of the Saturday School Society have sensed that they are in a unique venture. We think it most appropriate to preserve on paper a record of shared experiences for ourselves and for others.

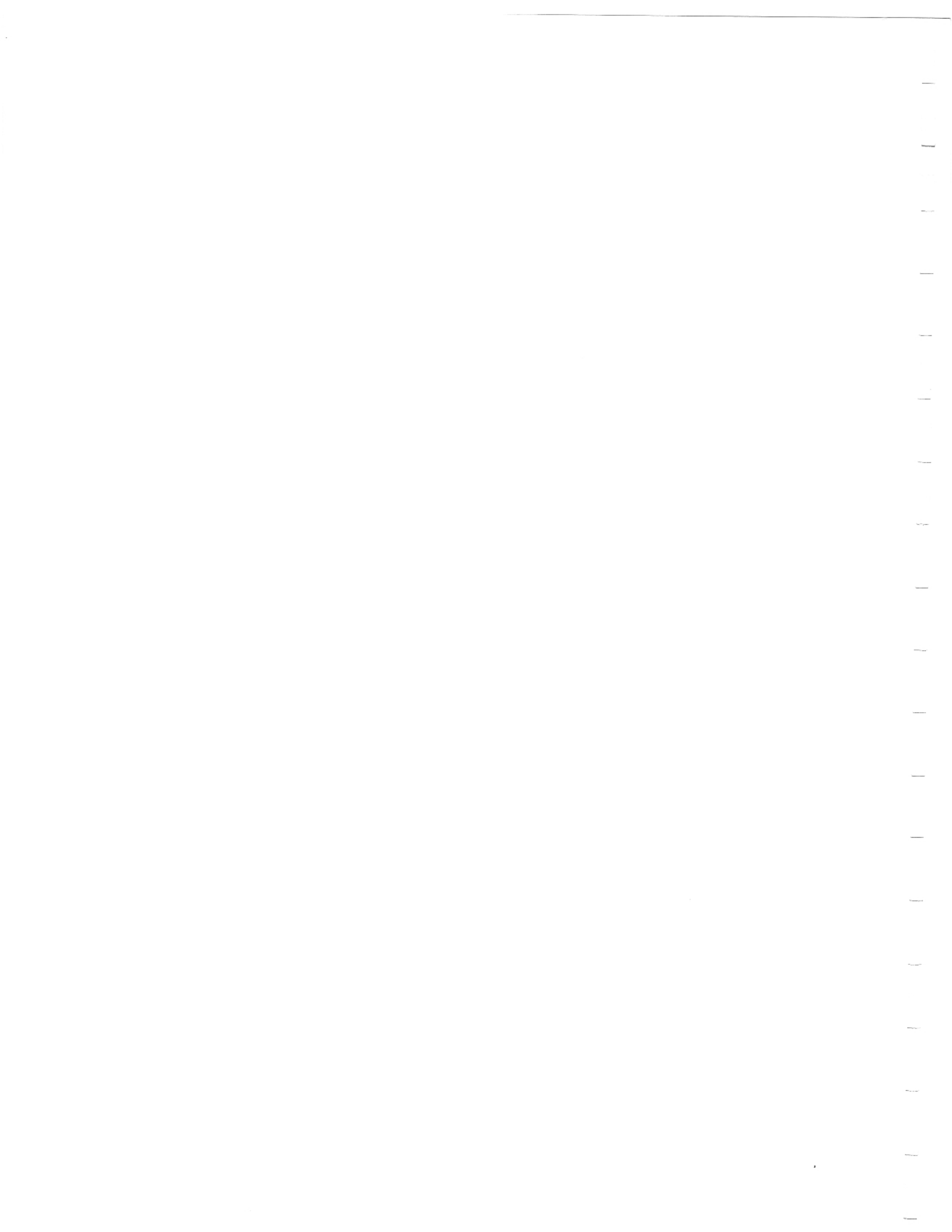
Like most ventures of the Saturday School Society, this account of the planning months is the result of co-operative effort. It would not have been possible without the detailed minutes and records kept by Pat Haring during the spring and summer of 1972. Lengthy comments from members of the group, in response to a questionnaire, provided colourful supplementary details. During December, 1972, I collected all the various records and documents and wrote the narrative account. Ben Gadd edited the manuscript; he and Norma Lamont looked after the production aspects.

- Bob Stamp, January 25, 1972



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In the Beginning

The Saturday School began in a very informal and incidental manner. During the month of January, 1972, Audrey Christie, Arlene Stamp, Pat Haring and Sandy Jones began gathering at the Christies' home every Tuesday afternoon to share coffee, cookies, and ideas about education. Little did they know that in the short space of eight months their discussions would give birth to a new school.

Audrey, Arlene and Pat had been battling their neighbourhood elementary school for over three years, attempting in vain to humanize it and to inject a greater emphasis on creativity. Audrey and her husband Bob had temporarily given up, and had transferred two of their children to another public school. But even at the new school the situation did not seem ideal; with their youngest child due to begin grade one the following September they were still searching for a better learning environment.

Arlene and Bob Stamp had not yet abandoned hope of reforming the school from within: that year Bob was serving as secretary of the school's parent-teachers' association. But by February they too had exhausted their patience; a complaint to the chief superintendent of schools concerning the teaching staff was to be their final effort. Pat and Norm Haring, although not as vocal as the other two couples, had also watched with despair as this same school had failed, so they felt, to provide a satisfactory learning environment for their daughter. Although Sandy and Peter Jones were not from the same school district, they had heard Audrey and the others complain frequently about the school. Nor were they completely satisfied with the public school system in general; at one time their two sons had been enrolled in a Montessori school.

All four families had previous experience with formal and informal learning environments. As an architect, Audrey had been associated with designing schools in Ottawa; as a docent she had conducted groups of students through the National Gallery. Both Arlene and Bob Stamp had been high school teachers in London, Ontario; at the time the Saturday School was organized, Bob was teaching in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary. Pat Haring had worked as a professional librarian, and her current volunteer and PTA activities had given her a close acquaintance with the neighbourhood school. Sandy was a writer, a former English teacher, and had once supervised a nursery school.

But perhaps it was their shared interest in humanizing education and in encouraging creativity in the schools, rather than any professed expertise, that brought the group together. As Arlene later recalled their early gatherings:

We were discussing our view of what an ideal school would be like. We pretended at this point to have no intention whatsoever of putting our ideas into practice. But Audrey felt that we had been negative for so long during our many hassles with our neighborhood school that we needed to be more constructive. I had just finished reading Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*¹ and was questioning every aspect of the traditional school—all the way from the need to teach facts to the need to teach reading. I can remember making statements that seemed to shock the other three. The day I chose to attack the teaching of all factual knowledge as unnecessary, both Audrey and Pat defended very strongly the need for knowledge accumulated by man in the past to be passed to each new generation.

I remember talking about letting the children burst in each morning, much as they do in Sylvia Ashton-Warner's book, *Teacher*,² letting them talk about what was interesting them right then and letting the 'curriculum' develop from there.

Sandy had just read Elwyn Richardson's *In the Early World*³ and had been deeply inspired by it as I had. I hadn't been able to recall the name of the book for several years but always remember that it had been a basic influence in my thinking. We certainly all agreed that the public schools were very sadly lacking in expressive kinds of activities like painting, dancing, drama, and music.

Gradually the Tuesday afternoon sessions became less casual and more serious as thoughts turned to the possibility of setting up a school. As Arlene later wrote:

I know I fought off the impulse for several weeks, knowing full well what sort of a huge undertaking it would be. But the more we inspired each other with the possibilities of our ideal school, the more it became clear that we could not settle for the kind of education our children were getting. Besides, it was marvellous to discuss educational ideas in such a positive and accepting atmosphere. We didn't have to

argue and defend our ideas against attacks from people with no understanding of the needs of children.

Both Audrey and Arlene proceeded to put down on paper their ideas of what the new school could be. Audrey wrote:

Self-realization or perhaps even 'revelation' is the goal of this school. Dedication to the ideal that each human is entitled to his individuality is essential. Certainly individuals may be grouped together to engage in a single activity. But it must be remembered that single members of the group are always entitled to react to the material presented in their own way. There is no *one* way of learning. Everyone learns in a way different from all others. It is not necessary to know exactly how he does this or to measure his progress, but rather to take care not to interfere with the individual's 'system' of learning.

To recognize the needs of the students will be the prime purpose of the teacher. For this, sensitivity to others will be the most important attribute — otherwise the sanctity of the individual will be violated. Dignity between individuals cannot be maintained unless the adult 'wills' it. By this is meant that the adult accepts the responsibility for the maintenance of a relationship of mutual self-respect. It is essential for the teacher to have an attitude of tolerance, a willingness to quietly solve 'problems', a readiness to listen rather than lecture, to create a feeling that all things are possible, to avoid coercion of any kind.

Imagination and a knack for improvisation on the part of the teachers and directors will be essential. These are basic attitudes that have been lost in the masses of bureaucratic red tape hung about the necks of those asked to teach today's children.

The motto will be *can* and never *cannot*. Expression will be positive, not negative. Kids will be told to 'do' rather than to 'not do'. Responsibility for self comes from experience in doing things, not from abstaining from 'forbidden' activities.

Teachers will not sit around waiting to be asked something by kids. The teachers are definitely to be the stimulators. They are responsible for continuous activities and for the progress of the child. They are the ones who can see the relationship between one area of study and another and who must skillfully and artfully lead the child from one related activity to another. In this way there will be a direction to activities.

The arts will not be strictly for art's sake, nor used for 'make work' projects. They will be used to allow an individual's reaction to an experience to be externalized freely. Art will be taught by experiencing materials—paint, pastels, paper, clay, etc.

While Audrey expressed her concern with primary principles and attitudes, Arlene's thoughts turned to the physical environment of the school:

The Classroom: the whole accessible community is the real classroom and should be used to a much greater extent than it presently is— not just to go and 'see' the outside world, but to be allowed to participate in whatever is going on— a visit to a museum which allowed children to use some of the old equipment, or a visit to a potter's studio where they could actually make pots. The home base classroom should be bright and cheerful and stimulating, with all materials and books accessible to children. A collection of contemporary resources (films, slides, magazine articles, tapes, photos) should be started immediately. A copying machine is a real necessity. As many games and puzzles as possible to improve different skills—dice games, map puzzles, word games. Many living plants and animals. Carpet for sitting on the floor. Outside play equipment.

The Curriculum: division of the curriculum into only three areas—communications, humanities, environmental studies— to ensure that any subject of current interest to a child can be included without the difficulty of 'fitting it in' to a particular subject area. Any child showing an interest in a particular question which he himself raises should always be allowed to research it and present it to the class as part of his curriculum. No one of course will be constantly motivated on his own and this is when the teacher's plans and suggestions might be brought in. A part of every day should be spent in the creative arts, be it dancing, drama, painting or crafts. Much use should be made of nature and the outdoors for laboratory and recreational activities.

Testing and Progression: children will not be divided into different age groups, but rather will participate at their own levels in mixed age group activities, learning from the older ones and helping the younger ones. Certain skills will be developed through individual study. Evaluation of the child's progress could take place from time to time in an interview among teacher, child and parents.

The Teacher: must be a very flexible, creative, innovative person with an understanding and tolerance for the ways of children. He or she cannot be expected to know all the information which would be covered in this wide-sweeping curriculum. He or she would work with the children to help them find out what they want to know and to help them broaden their horizons by learning how to question effectively. He or she should be a nature lover and be able to open the children's eyes to the wonders of their natural environment.

The Building: should display the children's work and creations; open, airy, bright and cheerful. Living plants and animals. Quite reading area with a rug. Individual work areas; raised platform for a stage; cooking area. Outside play area. Television set and copying machine; typewriter for kids. Each child should have one special spot all his own for all his things—preferably with his own bulletin board, table, etc.

The First Evening Meeting

What later became the Saturday School Society held its first organizational meeting at Bob and Arlene Stamp's home on a Thursday evening in late February. Bob and Audrey Christie were there, as were Pat Haring and Sandy Jones.

Also present were several newcomers, all of whom would play significant roles in the weeks ahead. There was Starla Anderson: a friend of the Christie's, a former junior high school language arts teacher in the city. Starla had just returned to Calgary from Jamaica, where her daughter had attended a "free" school. Audrey had identified Starla as a possible teacher for the new school and had introduced her to the Stamps, Harings and Jones a week or two previously. Gary de Leeuw, a friend of the Stamps and another University of Calgary instructor, was also present. Arlene had told Gary and his wife, Anne, about the idea for a school during a chance meeting while grocery shopping. There was Vera Ungstad, an instructor at the Alberta College of Art. Vera and Arlene had discussed school problems at great length the previous winter when Arlene had taken an evening art course from Vera. Vera in turn passed on news of the meeting to another art college person, Karen Sobee. Pat Hogan arrived with two teaching friends; Pat was a special education teacher in a Calgary school who had doubts about enrolling her own five-year-old in the public school system. And late in the evening Brent Cameron joined the group. Brent was to become our first teacher.

"I remember feeling that unusual people were present, the likes of whom had never been in our home," recalled Arlene. "When I opened the door late in the evening to find a tall, bearded man—very hippy-like—I thought for just a moment that he must have the wrong house. Then he said, 'Is this where the meeting is?' and I suddenly realized the kind of appeal our school would have."

What impression did people gain from that first meeting? Vera Ungstad later admitted that she "arrived with no idea that this meeting was to initiate a vast change in my life pattern." After that first meeting, continued Vera, "I felt sure that a school would materialize. I sensed within the group unusual abilities, understanding of children, and potential dynamism. From that evening I never doubted the feasibility of the project."

Pat Hogan described her reaction in these words: "I felt concern at the naive optimism of the group, yet was enthusiastic about what was being said. My worries were connected with what I thought was impracticality (financial mostly). At that point I was convinced that setting up a school was such a mammoth undertaking there was no possible way it could get going by September, 1972. It was hard, on the other hand, not to feel the enthusiasm of the rest of the people—who mostly impressed me by their genuine feelings about education, their warmth, and the amount of level-headed thinking they had already done."

Gary de Leeuw's recorded impressions of the first meeting were the most extensive of all. "I was impressed with the creative potential of the group. There was an atmosphere of acceptance of people and ideas. Although I sensed that people differed in important ways in educational perspectives, I felt confident that the necessary compromises could be made. I knew that 'free schools' had a history of failure after very short periods, but I believed that a school founded by this group would differ radically from these schools."

Yet Gary also felt some apprehension. "The presence of several fairly outspoken representatives of the 'counter culture' concerned me. It seemed that we had attracted a number of people who knew what they were against, but little about what they were for. Some rather naive things were said—that we should avoid adult direction and learn to play with the children; that the natural interests of children, if permitted to flower, would produce all learning needed by people in society. I sensed a danger of polarization and fragmentation within the group, and I feared that the more 'radical' people might manipulate the 'liberals', using a type of psychological blackmail I had encountered in student communities."

Certainly the general response was positive enough to warrant another meeting the following week. "It was a very heady meeting where dreams were outlined for a wonderful new school that children would actually enjoy," recalled Arlene. "We must have felt that we were on the right track and set to roll. We didn't know at this time when we would be opening, but we knew it had to be sometime."

Meetings Every Week

From that point on the weekly meetings continued through the late winter months and into the spring. For many of the individuals involved, the evening meetings soon became the focus around which their activities revolved. Names, addresses and phone numbers of interested people were kept. Lists of books were made and the books circulated among individuals. Elwyn Richardson's *In the Early World* seemed to be the most popular. Vera, Arlene and others began putting down on paper their ever-developing thoughts about an ideal learning environment. Preliminary contact was made with the Alberta Department of Education to ascertain the official attitude toward private schools.

The group also learned about alternative schools in other cities. The first such school contacted, however, proved to be the furthest away from our "ideal" as was ideologically possible. This was Tempo School in Edmonton, which turned out to be as traditional a private school as possible. Several women from the group travelled to Edmonton to observe the school in action and returned with a long list of philosophies and practices to be avoided. On the other hand, Bob Christie's report on the New School in Vancouver was most encouraging. Here was a school, considerably larger than the one we envisioned, that seemed to share many of our concerns and approaches. Doris Dyke met with the group one evening and recalled her role in establishing two alternative schools in Saskatoon. Starla Anderson's sister spoke of free schools that she had observed in California. Gary de Leeuw continually reminded everyone of the short life of most such ventures—poor financial footing and divergent expectations among parents seemed to be the most frequent cause of failure.

As the weeks progressed, membership in the group grew; in many cases it seemed as if the right individuals materialized when most needed. Ken and Una Sturdy were valuable additions. "When Ken started coming to the meetings, a determined calm came over the whole thing," Pat Hogan recalled. Ken was another Alberta College of Art instructor, who shared Vera and Audrey's concern for an art-centred approach to learning. He also had gained first-hand experience teaching in the British Open School System. After the university term ended, Anne de Leeuw became a regular member of the group; she too was enthusiastic about the British Open School approach. Norma and John Lamont joined the group at precisely the time their printing and accounting knowledge was invaluable. Monica Mark provided practical advice on the

economics of operating a private school, based on the first hand experience she and her husband had with a school in Edmonton. Ben and Cia Gadd came along later in the spring and contributed some fresh perspectives on child-raising and practical know-how. They had been influenced by A. S. Neill's *Summerhill: a Radical Approach to Child Rearing*,⁴ and the work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Two of Gary de Leeuw's students——Ron Low and Don Boyes——joined the group and played vital roles.

Of course there were many low points during these weekly planning meetings. Pat Hogan spoke of "the times I hassled with other people and the times I went at things so hard I got totally strung out." Pat also remembered "some of the frustrating meetings where everyone talked at once and topics never got covered." Norma Lamont had similar memories. "Our one fault was beating around the bush at the beginning, and therefore dragging the meeting out unnecessarily into the small hours of the morning." Una Sturdy recalled that "Recapitulating during the week following one of these meetings would frequently bring out the realization that we had strayed from an issue without returning to it and without reaching a conclusion."

To a considerable extent these problems resulted from a lack of internal organization. No formal executive existed; there were no clearly defined lines of authority, and meetings were conducted without any formalities. Everyone seemed to agree that a common sharing of responsibility was more appropriate for an alternative school venture, and agreement by consensus was used successfully throughout the months of planning. No formal votes were ever taken. These procedures did lead to many frustrating and disorganized sessions, as Pat, Norma and Una have recalled. But eventually some semblance of order permeated the sessions as Bob Christie took responsibility for preparing a written agenda and for chairing the meetings. Later on, we instituted a revolving chairmanship, in which each meeting was chaired by a different member of the group, and an agenda prepared at the beginning of each gathering. Throughout the period Pat Haring acted as secretary, preserving the minutes and other records of the group.

The high points outweighed the low points and kept everyone coming back week after week. Norma summed it up in this manner:

The best point about these meetings was that they were held in peoples' homes and provided an intimate personal setting. The whole thing was highly exciting. Everyone took a portion of the responsibility and things got done as quickly as

they possibly could. During this time we formed a close community among the adults. This provided the vehicle for working together with as little strife as possible. I felt that I formed some good friendships and I think these warm feelings among the people involved were very important to the success of our plans.

Or as Una remembered:

The greatest accomplishment was a growing feeling among those present that we shared a common purpose and it looked highly possible that our school would materialize. The high point was the democratic spirit that prevailed. How pleasant it was to be among people who were all willing to give each person present a hearing.

Getting Things Down on Paper: the Prospectus

During the months of March and April certain ideas about learning emerged from the group as a whole—ideas that were shared and adopted with very little disagreement. These ideas did not seem to be present in the public schools; they represented, in fact, the inevitable positive program for action that replaced our initial negativism toward public education. A determination to incorporate this program in the proposed alternative school kept the group together and moving forward during the spring months.

One of the central points was the importance of the creative arts in initiating learning for elementary school children. Sandy Jones had first introduced this approach when she spoke of *In the Early World*, Elwyn Richardson's account of his teaching experience in rural New Zealand. The theoretical background was provided by Vera Ungstad, who introduced Herbert Read's *Education through Art*,⁵ and by Don Boyes, who alluded to Brian Way's *Development through Drama*.⁶ Ken Sturdy and Audrey Christie were other early supporters of the art-centred approach. The group came to see such activities as painting, ceramics, crafts, music, drama and dancing not as entertainment reserved for the end of the school day, but as essential parts of the learning process.

A second cardinal point was the belief in the integration of learning activities for elementary-age children. People objected to the somewhat artificial division of the day in public schools: arithmetic at 9:00 a.m., spelling at 9:30, reading at 10:00, and so on. The group also objected to the traditional approach in which every child in the class works at the same thing at the same time. Vera, Ken and Audrey saw the creative arts as stimuli that would lead a child into other kinds of learning at his own time and at his own pace. It was thought that a child's own interests would lead him from the creative arts into the various other learning activities.

Anne and Gary de Leeuw introduced the group to a working model of the integrated school day—the British Open School.

Gary recalled his attempt to promote the British Open School as less than completely successful. "The British integrated curriculum was one of the few child-centred programs proven after years of experimentation. I hoped that it might be a nice compromise upon which potentially divergent factions might settle. Unfortunately, when I was asked to describe the model, my inadequate understanding

of the British experience combined with a choice of words that seemed inappropriate to some of the group, and produced a somewhat negative response." Elizabeth Gasson's later attempt to describe her first-hand experiences with British Open Schools suffered a similar fate. While the integrated curriculum was accepted by the group, there remained an unwillingness to adopt this particular version of it. Perhaps, as Ben Gadd put it, "We wanted to do things our way, letting the curriculum develop in a manner suited uniquely to our own situation."

The third central idea held by the group at this time was the importance of the community in stimulating learning. Bob and Arlene Stamp, Audrey Christie and Pat Haring were probably the strongest advocates of this approach. For some time they had been trying in vain to promote closer school-community relations at their neighborhood elementary school. The group quickly gave support to many aspects of school-community relations: the use of parent and other community resource people within the school, the use of the physical resources of the surrounding community— in fact, a collapse of the stone wall that so frequently seemed to separate school and community was envisioned.

By mid-April there seemed to be basic agreement on these points by all concerned. It was deemed essential that these thoughts be committed to paper as a means of consolidating vaguely held ideas and of acquainting newcomers with the basic principles. On April 21 Anne de Leeuw, Ken Sturdy, Bob Christie and Bob Stamp met and began drafting what came to be called the "Prospectus for an Alternative School in Calgary." The draft copy of "Part I: The Philosophy of the School" was scrutinized line by line at subsequent meetings, rewritten and adopted. Then Bob Christie set to work on "Part II: Finances and Organization." Both parts of the prospectus were finished during the month of May. (A copy follows.)

PROSPECTUS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL IN CALGARY

May, 1972

PART I: THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

A. Basic Principles

The principle of the proposed school is to encourage the natural growth of what is unique in each child and at the same time enable the child to relate to the society of which he is an integral member. It is our fundamental belief that this dual aim can best be achieved through an art-centered or aesthetic approach to learning in a natural community setting.

B. Importance of an Art-Centered or Aesthetic Education

Our belief in the importance of aesthetic education is founded on the conviction that the following considerations are vital:

- i. Instinctive forms of sensing and perceiving should be sharpened and used continuously whenever opportunity offers.
- ii. The various forms of sensing and perceiving should be led to function in harmony with themselves and their environment.
- iii. Means should be presented to enable both the emotions and mental concepts to be communicated in an effective form.
- iv. Through aesthetic education it is possible to put a real value on originality and creativity and to develop skills of questioning and critical analysis.
- v. Through the development of the senses a heightened awareness of self in its relationship to the surrounding environment will be achieved.

C. Importance of Community

We believe that learning is enhanced when a real sense of community is developed. To accomplish this sense of community within a school, the artificial walls and barriers that exist between teachers, students, and parents must be broken down. Individuals within the school should not be regarded only as "teachers", "students" and "parents" but as human beings -- each an individual in his own right, yet each a part of a larger group. This could be accomplished by encouraging different kinds of teaching-learning situations -- children teaching other children, adults teaching adults, children teaching adults, etc. In this way it is hoped that children will gain a better understanding of themselves as individuals and of their relationship with other people.

This idea of community should not be confined to the internal aspects of the school -- it must also extend to the school's external relationships. The school should not be isolated from the physical community in which it is located. It is hoped that the skills developed by a basically aesthetic approach to learning will enable the children to achieve a heightened awareness of their surrounding community and environment.

D. Why an Alternate School?

As society becomes more pluralistic and comes to accept greater divergence of opinion regarding values and attitudes, alternative schools are essential for the fulfillment of educational philosophies acceptable to various groups of children and parents. Despite the growing decentralization in educational decision-making, individual public schools find it impossible to meet the needs and expectations of all children and all parents.

Public schools are increasingly becoming larger; they are also parts of large systems. These two factors necessitate that administrators seek a certain "middle ground" in attempting to cater to the various needs and expectations of children and parents. Thus, compromises have to be made; it is of course unrealistic to expect that these compromises will be acceptable to everyone.

We believe that size, impersonality, and bureaucratic organization make it impossible to achieve our desired goals within the modern urban public school system. An alternate school is essential in order to create an art-centered, integrated approach to learning in an intimate community setting.

E. The Program of the School

The approach envisaged for the school is by no means a radical innovation in educational philosophy. The idea of emphasizing aesthetic education, stressing the integral relation between creative expression and other kinds of learning experiences, was advanced a generation ago by the British art philosopher and educator, Herbert Read. The idea of the learning environment as a natural community of individuals was advanced 80 years ago by the American philosopher and educator, John Dewey. Aspects of these two ideas have been successfully implemented in many schools in many countries in

recent years -- most notably in the British primary schools and in the New Zealand classroom of teacher Elwyn S. Richardson.

"The school functioned as a community of artists and scientists who turned a frank and searching gaze on all that came within their ambit, curiosity and emotional force lead them to explore together the natural world and the world of their feelings. They learned to esteem each other's explorations, discoveries, and records with discriminating enthusiasm, so that a fine collective strength was developed, a strength depending on each child making an individual search and bringing to the group what only he could give. In return the group sustained each child and valued his discoveries; its achievements pressed him onto further exploration".**

In the day-to-day activities of the school, the focus of experience will provide for the following needs of children:

- i. Sympathetic: the need to talk and listen and the need to act -- the communicative and dramatic instincts.
- ii. Creative: the need to draw, paint and model and the need to sing and dance -- the artistic and musical instincts.
- iii. Scientific: the need to know the reason why things are the way they are and the need to make things -- the inquisitive and constructive instincts.
- iv. Social: the need to become aware of the beliefs, feelings and perceptions of **other** people and other groups -- the need to develop warm interpersonal relationships and relationships with larger groups.

Expressed in another way, the instructional goals of the school will be to encourage the development of the following:

- i. A sense of self-confidence, a sense of self-reliance and a feeling of competence.
- ii. An awareness of and a responsibility to the human community and the natural environment.
- iii. Warm interpersonal relationships with peers and with people of other age groups.
- iv. Creative skills and talents.
- v. The communicative and analytic skills.
- vi. A positive attitude towards learning and life.

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**Elwyn S. Richardson, In the Early World. Wellington: New Zealand Council of Educational Resources 1964

vii. Self-evaluation.

The day-to-day activities of the school will be characterized by the following:

- i. Creative expression as a starting point and basis for learning.
- ii. The whole community as a classroom.
- iii. Co-operative learning.
- iv. Integration of subject matter.
- v. Natural inquiry and discovery approaches to learning.
- vi. Freedom from rigid subject scheduling.
- vii. Individual progress in skill-related areas.

F. The Personnel of the School

The key individual will be the teacher or teachers. He/she should be knowledgeable, be able to relate openly to children and adults, be sensitive to the needs of each child and be able to satisfy those needs when the demand arises, have a sense of imagination and be able to improvise, have a certain aesthetic sense and be able to see the relationship between aesthetic development and other learning experiences.

But the teacher or teachers cannot be expected to carry the "teaching" responsibility single-handedly. They will be expected to make use of other children, adult volunteers and special resource people to enrich the learning experience. Older children will assist with the learning development of the younger ones. Volunteer helpers will be drawn from among parents, university students and community members. They will work under the direction of the teacher in assisting with the learning program. Resource people will also be drawn from the parents and the community at large. They will be brought in when their particular skills, expertise and talents are needed to enhance the program.

The teacher or teachers must also be willing to go outside the school in order to enrich the program. Indeed, the school will act merely as a home base, with the entire community as the classroom in the broadest sense. The personnel and facilities of the Glenbow-Alberta Museum and Heritage Park will be used to supplement the social studies program. In a similar way the planetarium, zoo, aquarium and the natural outdoor environment will be used to supplement the science program. Newspaper offices, television studios and radio stations will be used to supplement the study of communications. Art galleries and theatre

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facilities will be used to enrich the study of the arts. Stores, business establishments and community service agencies will be used to supplement all aspects of the program.

PART II: FINANCES AND ORGANIZATION

A. Finances

1. Initial membership fee will be \$25.00 per family.
2. Participating parents will purchase a minimum of one debenture in the amount of \$75.00 to provide for capital purchases and emergencies. The debenture fund may be borrowed from, and will be replenished from fees. Principal but not interest will be returned when participants leave the school: the debentures will normally be repaid in August.
3. Monthly fees will be \$60.00 for one child, \$50.00 for a second child. Fees for additional children from one family may be reduced. Additional: Note 1.

B. Organization

Activities of the school will be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust between teachers and parents.

1. General direction of the school will be by parents, collectively. A general meeting of parents will be held once a month.
2. A Board will be elected annually to manage the business aspects of the school and the educational policy. The Board will meet every two weeks.
3. A Director will be **elected** and will be responsible*for coordination and liaison in the school. The Director will provide liaison between the teacher(s) and the parents to ensure the preservation of the classroom^o autonomy of the teacher(s).

*A provincial requirement: one person shall be named as "responsible" for the school.

4. A Head Teacher will be responsible for the management of the day-to-day instructional activities of the school.
5. a) The Board will be made up of:
 - The Director
 - An Assistant Director
 - A Secretary-Treasurer
 - The teacher(s)
 - A past Director
 - And at least 6 members representing various curricular concerns.
- b) To provide continuity, the Director and Assistant Director should remain in office 2 years, their terms coinciding.

- c) The six members will serve terms as demand requires, either less than or more than a year.
 - d) The Board shall employ the teacher(s) on a one-year contract.
 - e) The Board will provide general advice on curriculum and instructional matters.
6. Principles for staffing of the school:
- a) Pupil to adult ratio should not normally exceed 8:1.
 - b) Pupil to teacher ratio should not normally exceed 24:1.
 - c) The age range in a class should not be less than 3 or more than 7 years.
 - d) A maximum school enrollment in the order of 48 to 60 children will be considered. Additional: Note 2.
 - e) A psychologist may be available on a standby basis to help identify problems and to advise.
7. Principles for conduct of the school:
- a) The teacher(s) and Director will interview all parents to explain the philosophy of the school and to determine compatibility of the family and the school.
 - b) The school will function on a community basis, and parents, as part of the community, are essential to the functioning of the school. A parent will contribute a minimum of one day a month at the school, or provide equivalent support (e.g. service or materials, etc.).

C. Proposed Schedule

1. Starting and closing dates will be consonant with the Calgary public schools.
2. Daily: begin 8:30 a.m., end about 3:00 p.m. But school may be active from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with evening and weekend activities possible on occasion. Slight variations in arrival and departure times will be considered normal. Additional: Note 3.
3. Attendance records adequate to meet provincial requirements will be kept.
4. Children will have lunch at the school.

NOTES:

1. *Fees will be reduced, or scholarships provided, if subsidies are obtained.* Although the school must ensure itself of viability, it should aim for a cosmopolitan composition, including range of economic levels.
2. The school should avoid bigness to avoid bureaucratic problems such as rigidity: further growth should take place as new, small schools.
3. Rigid timetables and artificial formality would be alien to the atmosphere that should exist in the school.

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From Theory into Practice: the Saturday Schools

The ideas discussed at the Tuesday meetings and formalized in the prospectus obviously appealed to the group as a whole. But how feasible were they? Would they work in practice? Audrey Christie proposed that the ideas be tried in a series of Saturday morning experimental sessions. Additional purposes for such sessions were soon suggested—they would help the families become better acquainted and they would serve as a means of interesting other parents in the Monday-to-Friday school now planned for September.

Saturday, April 22, the first Saturday after Easter, was chosen for the inaugural session of ten weekly workshops. The basement of the Unitarian Church was rented for a sum of \$15 per day. Fees were set at \$10 per child for the entire series of workshops, or \$1 per session for visitors. Members of the group quickly spread the word to friends and neighbors who might be interested: fifteen children were needed to pay the rent. On the first Saturday morning no fewer than 30 appeared; attendance over the next nine sessions varied between 30 and 45. The financially-oriented members of the group breathed more easily!

What happened that first Saturday? The morning began on a very positive note as Don Boyes conducted an hour-long creative drama activity that saw parents and children having fun together. "In spite of my bad back," recalled Rolf Ungstad, "Don's drama session inspired me to roll on the floor!" Lunch was a community effort with everyone sharing in pot luck. During the afternoon a number of activities took place simultaneously: slide-making, with Ron Low; kite-making, with Steve Allen; clay, with Vera and Rolf Ungstad; painting and crafts, with Audrey and Arlene; paper aeroplane-making, with Gary de Leeuw. There was a corner for quiet activities with books and games. But in the centre of the gymnasium floor, indoor hockey and soccer competed noisily with the calmer activities taking place around the periphery.

At three o'clock the children and adults gathered to assess the day's activities. All agreed that the Saturday sessions should be continued. Suggestions for additional activities were not slow in coming: let's have floor hockey and soccer tournaments; let's make more things out of clay and let's dig our own clay; let's put on a play; let's do photography and film making; let's

mix chemicals and see what happens; let's go camping for a weekend at Dinosaur Park; let's visit a buffalo jump, a ranch, a factory. During the ensuing weeks many of these activities were added. But the most popular activities continued to be working with clay and the video-taping of the creative drama sessions.

Although parents and children kept coming to the Saturday sessions, there were mixed feelings about their value. Vera Ungstad admitted that she sometimes felt that "the children did too much sampling without enough involvement, and that it was superficial stimulation which kept them going rather than a sense of personal satisfaction gained from deep involvement. But this was part of our growth and was beneficial in that we were aware of what was happening and could gain insight based on direct experience." Yet, at the same time, Vera was most pleased at the reaction of her twin boys. "They were interested and enthusiastic right from the beginning, even though they preferred to be onlookers during some of the activities. Over the ten-week period I noticed a marked difference in their self images and in their social adjustment. They seemed elevated by the community spirit and began to think up ways in which they could contribute."

As the weather improved during the spring months, field trips and other outdoor activities began to supplement the sessions in the church basement. First came a geologic field trip one afternoon to local outcrops in Edworthy Park, then a day at the Ungstads' farm, a weekend of camping at Dinosaur Provincial Park, and finally a Saturday School picnic at Bowness Park. Variations in individual assessment of these activities continued to reveal divergent views among the adults.

Delores McQuarrie had these observations on the Edworthy Park trip, her first contact with the group: "The outing seemed to be like a typical school outing. I could not really see any clear objectives, but most people seemed to enjoy the geology. I certainly did. Any learning was largely incidental. Little feedback, transfer or carryover seemed to occur. However, most people seemed to enjoy it and that's most important."

The day at the Ungstads' farm introduced a host of new activities to many of the children: care of farm animals, primitive weaving, ice-cream making, and firing of clay pots. "The goats had diarrhea and slept all the next day," recalled Rolf. "I guess the children learned how much they like powdered molasses." General reactions

to the day were again quite varied. "Some of the children were left out of everything with most adults completely unaware of this," stated David Thompson. On the other hand, Brent Cameron was "so impressed by the parents and kids. So much showing, sharing, caring. Parents who were doing all this must really care about their kids."

Vera remembered the day as a "glorified picnic, with everyone catering to the children. If undertaken again it would likely be a follow-up for many things the children are involved in at school. The kinds of experiences the children underwent that day are immeasurable. Even though many children didn't do the primitive weaving, they saw what was happening. It may have been the first important step to later involvement. The next exposure will revive the memory of the farm experience."

The Dinosaur Park weekend produced similar positive-negative reactions. Una Sturdy expressed disappointment that the geological possibilities of the park were not exploited to their full learning potential. "Swimming in the creek proved a much stronger attraction for many of the children. They should have been alerted in a very definite manner when two experts in geology had specific skills and talents to present." Rolf Ungstad carried away with him many pleasant memories of the weekend: eating lunch on a pinnacle, watching Ben Gadd (one of the "experts") gallop up and down the slopes with the children, using a pound of butter to grease half-burnt popcorn, watching Ken Sturdy cook hamburgers for everyone, and watching Audrey Christie methodically choosing the space for her family's tent.

Yet, as the Saturday sessions of spring 1972 unfolded, most of the adults felt that the positive benefits far outweighed any reservations. "The high point was probably the community spirit engendered; this continued to permeate all our gatherings," recalled Una. Or as Norma Lamont put it: "During them we learned that we could work together and that the kids benefited from and enjoyed these sessions. They were family activities with both adults and children involved. And the adults were not necessarily the experts at any particular project. It was a total learning experience for most families."

Certainly by the end of June the adults and children had come to know one another and many new friendships were formed. New families became involved, each contributing ideas and expertise to the venture: David and Ruth Thompson, Anne and Frank Bercha, Rita and David Wehrhahn. Practical experience in working together had been gained. Most children seemed to enjoy working

with the creative arts, which, after all, were of central importance to the group. The final few Saturdays had also given the group a chance to observe in action some of the candidates for the teaching position in the proposed permanent school.

And finally the Saturday sessions at the Unitarian Church produced the name that was ultimately adopted for the school. Names had been discussed casually at earlier meetings: "The Alternative School" and "The Community School" had both been suggested. But the group had decided to wait until a name emerged spontaneously from the adults and children involved. Very quickly everyone began referring to the Unitarian Church sessions as "The Saturday School." All agreed that it was an ideal name. As Una and Ken Sturdy later put it: "It expressed the hope that children would find Monday-to-Friday activities as meaningful and as interesting as weekends, thereby maintaining a 'Saturday' spirit all week long."

Legal Matters and Money

With an agreed-upon philosophy as expressed in the prospectus, and practical experience gained through the Saturday sessions at the Unitarian Church, the group was now determined to press ahead with plans for a permanent school in September. This meant an extremely busy spring and summer for all concerned. Provincial approval to operate a private school had to be obtained. Finances had to be carefully investigated. And three very crucial ingredients had to be confirmed: a teacher, a sufficient number of pupils, and a building in which to conduct the school.

Interim approval from the Alberta Department of Education proved to be the easiest hurdle to overcome. Members were aware that private schools did operate with provincial approval in Alberta, and that Alberta was more generous than most provinces in providing some financial assistance after a school had been in operation for three years. As early as February, Arlene Stamp had written to Education Minister Louis Hyndman requesting information on the steps required to obtain approval. Mr. Hyndman immediately put the group in touch with Dr. E.J.M. Church, director of special educational services (including private schools) within the Department of Education.

Members of the group met with Dr. Church on May 12 in a conference room of the provincial government office in downtown Calgary. Dr. Church was presented with a copy of the prospectus, listened to Gary de Leeuw outline the general philosophy and approach, and engaged in a friendly question-and-answer session with those present. His enthusiastic and positive response almost overwhelmed the group. Remarking that it was a refreshing change to find a group with educational reasons (rather than religious reasons) for starting a private school, Dr. Church declared that once a formal application reached him he would be prepared to recommend approval to the Minister of Education. (This was finally confirmed in December of 1972).

The need for some formal, constituted authority persuaded the group to seek registration as a society under the Societies Act of Alberta. Various other forms of organization were discussed, including a co-operative, but the group felt that a society would provide the

necessary flexibility. With the volunteer assistance of Gerald Pittman, a lawyer whose children attended the sessions at the Unitarian Church, the group drew up its regulations and by-laws in a manner similar to the French School Society of Calgary. By early fall everything was in order and the Saturday School Society existed in law as well as in fact.

Provincial approval and registration as a society were necessary steps, but neither provided any financial support for the Saturday School. Three years seemed too long to wait to qualify for provincial education grants. Ken Sturdy suggested another provincial agency that might be favourably disposed: the Cultural Affairs Branch of the Department of Youth, Recreation and Culture. The branch was sponsoring a weekend conference at Banff in mid-May in which the topic "Art and Education" would be discussed. Ken, Vera Ungstad, and Audrey Christie attended the conference, passing out copies of the prospectus, participating in small group sessions, and generally spreading the word about the school. Although there was sympathetic interest in the project, Vera reported that the Saturday School Society was too late to secure funds for the current budget year. Ken, Vera and Audrey agreed to continue as a liaison committee with the Cultural Affairs Branch.

Another possibility existed at the local level in the Calgary Regional Arts Foundation (CRAF), a municipally funded agency that provided grants to groups in the creative and performing arts. Pat Hogan agreed to put together a brief requesting \$3000 assistance for the 1972-73 school year. Again, Pat received a sympathetic response from the various CRAF executives she contacted, but no funds were forthcoming. It seemed that CRAF had been deluged with requests for funding at that time; in addition, the foundation had decided to concentrate much of its money on a proposed Calgary arts festival in the spring of 1973.

From the beginning the members of the Saturday School Society had not placed too much hope in outside funding. The realization dawned early that the society would have to be self-supporting, and that the support would have to come almost entirely from student fees. This posed something of a dilemma: on the one hand the group wanted to ensure economic viability, but at the same time everyone wanted to keep fees low enough to be within reach of most families. Fees of \$60 per month were reluctantly agreed to, and an enrolment of approximately 25 pupils was deemed necessary to generate the required total operating sum. During the summer John Lamont was named treasurer of the society. Unlike many alternative school ventures in North America, the Saturday School began operation on a sound financial footing.

Hiring a Teacher

The selection of a teacher for the first year of operation proved one of the more difficult and exhausting challenges for the group during the months of May and June. There had been some talk of operating without a full-time, paid teacher——filling the gap with parent and community volunteers——but the group soon decided that leadership and continuity could not be entrusted to part-time personnel. A teacher had to be employed. Starla Anderson, Ron Low and Don Boyes were three prospective teacher candidates who had been associated with the group throughout these months. But in the end Starla moved to British Columbia, while Ron and Don both accepted teaching positions with the Calgary Public School Board. (Ironically, Ron was placed in the same school that had originally prompted the Christies, Stamps, and Harings to consider an alternative learning environment!)

It was now early May. A teacher would have to be hired very quickly if he or she were to play a meaningful role in planning for a school opening date in early September.

What did the Saturday School Society seek in its prospective teacher? Six criteria were ultimately chosen: agreement with the group's philosophy of education, experience in primary education, availability and willingness to work, ability to work with parents and volunteers, attitude towards creativity, self-confidence. A selection committee consisted of Gary de Leeuw (as a "university" representative), Pat Hogan (a "teacher" representative), Ken Sturdy (an "artist") and Audrey Christie (a "parent"). Eleven-year-old Johanna de Leeuw sat in on some of the early interviews before she and her parents left Calgary to spend the summer in Texas.

The following advertisement was drawn up and placed in the *Calgary Herald* and the Alberta Teachers' Association *Newsletter*:

TEACHER FOR ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

We are starting a school in Calgary for children ages 5 - 12. It will have an integrated curriculum based on creative experiences. We are interested in someone who has taught in such an environment. Alberta certification or equivalent required. If interested

please write, stating your relevant experience, your philosophy of education, your reasons for wanting to teach in such a school, and your willingness to participate in our on-going Saturday workshops. Apply before May 31 to: Alternative School, 3438 - 6th Street S.W., Calgary.

"One of our shortcomings here was the lack of continuity in the membership of the committee," Pat Hogan later recalled. Few individuals participated in all the interviews, while many were present for one or two. Bob and Arlene Stamp, Starla Anderson, Vera Ungstad, and Norma Lamont were all involved in the selection committee's work as time went on. "We also had some public relations problems with our applicants," stated Pat. If it was a new experience for members of the society, it was also a new experience for most of the applicants—very different from dealing with a public school board. "I feel that my role as an interviewee has been that of a mouse, the prey for the eagles, who are the feared predators of that mouse," stated one of the candidates.

But there was no shortage of applications. Some two dozen letters reached the committee during the last two weeks of May from elementary and secondary teachers, from those with local experience and those with experience in other countries and other cultures, from those with successful public school experiences and those who had felt very frustrated teaching in the public school setting. Approximately ten applicants were interviewed by the committee, and from these, five were invited to test their ideas at the Saturday sessions still in progress at the Unitarian Church.

Saturday, June 17, was the final day at the church, and it was on this occasion that the majority of members in the society were impressed by Brent Cameron as the leading applicant for the teaching position. That morning Brent had prepared a comprehensive layout of material and equipment to illustrate the theme of balance. Many of the children eagerly participated in activities that illustrated balance in mathematics, in nature, in music, and in body motion. The selection committee decided in favour of Brent the following week, and by the end of the month the Saturday School Society had its teacher.

Brent had actually attended the very first evening meeting of the group, held at Bob and Arlene Stamp's home in February. "But I felt that the group didn't need a teacher because the parents would run the school," recalled Brent. "I didn't have any kids and wasn't about to meet those criteria. I saw good people, doing an intelligent thing, wished them best, and left." Realization that the group was seriously searching for a teacher brought Brent to the Saturday session at Vera and Rolf Ungstad's farm in May. "I was so impressed by the parents and kids. So much showing, sharing, caring.... I had idealized a community like this, but after living for two years without a drop of it, I didn't know if it was really happening. I wanted to be a part of it."

During July and August Brent met regularly with the group at its weekly meetings and gradually came to assume a leadership role. A second full-time or part-time teacher was by this time financially impossible due to the decision to begin with 28 children, but the society was committed to a low pupil/adult ratio in the school and had to think seriously about volunteer help. Anne de Leeuw and Ron Low had both spoken of half-time work in the school, but Ron's acceptance of a public school teaching position left only Anne. Other members of the society then reaffirmed their commitment to participating as parent volunteers on a one, two or three half-day per week basis. By August Pat Hogan was acting as volunteer coordinator and scheduling volunteers for the month of September.

The Twenty-eight Children

From the beginning, the group wanted to start with a small number of children because the experimental nature of the operation called for optimum conditions. The demands that the approach was likely to make on the teacher and parent volunteers convinced members that fewer problems were likely to emerge from a small operation. The first concrete suggestion was for no more than 20 pupils. But it was soon realized that this number would not generate sufficient revenue in fees to make the school economically viable. So, reluctantly, the number was raised to 25. But we heeded a warning from several outside visitors that we should expect a ten percent drop-out rate during the first year of operation. Thus the final decision for 28 children was made.

But where were the children to come from? Early in the spring months the group had little idea of whether there would be a flood or a trickle of applicants. Thinking optimistically that a flood might develop, first priority was given to children whose parents formed the original core group, second priority to children who had attended the Saturday sessions at the Unitarian Church, and third priority to other interested families. Pat Hogan acted as registrar during these months, receiving formal applications and membership dues, and arranging family interviews to ensure that philosophies and expectations were mutually acceptable.

Of course the flood of applications did not materialize. By June 1 only 18 children were definite for the proposed September opening. And there was no balance between older and younger children, or between boys and girls. Especially alarming was the ratio of four girls to 14 boys. So the Society set to work to attract ten additional children and, hopefully, to redress the balance between age groups and sexes. Leaflets, brochures, press releases, parents' meetings, and final interviews helped to fill the school with children and volunteers for September.

Actually, the publicity campaign had begun before June. At the end of April, when the Saturday sessions at the Unitarian Church were beginning, a leaflet was mimeographed and distributed widely. Hundreds of copies went out to parents who might be interested: parents associated with such nursery schools and kindergartens as the Calgary Creative School, Campus Co-operative School, Christopher Robin School, Calgary French School, and to parents connected with the University of Calgary and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. The leaflet read:

AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL IN CALGARY

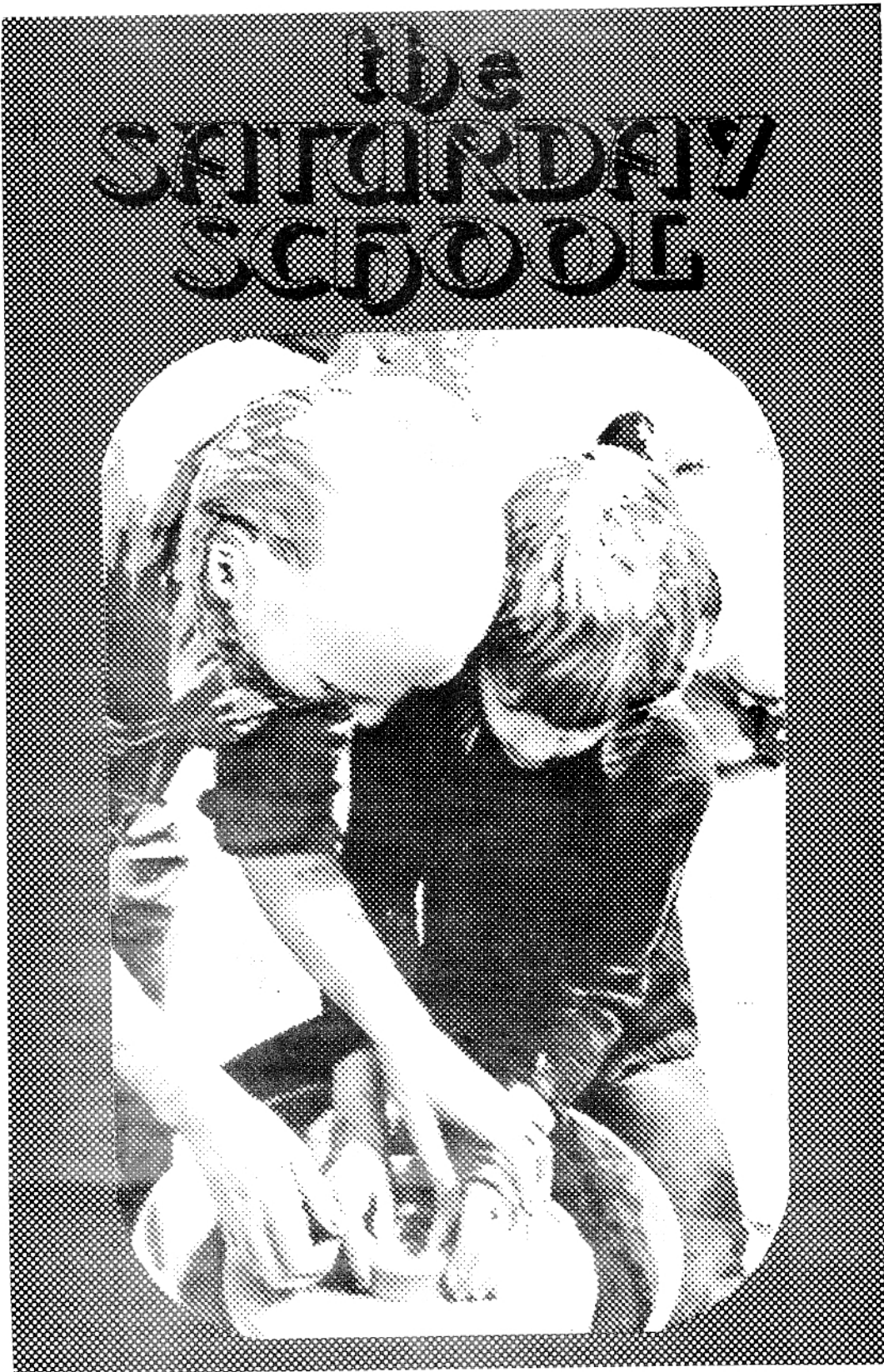
We are starting a school in Calgary for children ages 5-12. The emphasis will be on an integrated curriculum based on creative experiences. The atmosphere will be that of a small, intimate community. Parental involvement and commitment to the goals and operation of the school is essential.

For further information please contact:

Audrey and Bob Christie 287-2456
Ken and Una Sturdy 284-3016
Rolf and Vera Ungstad 272-1952

Those who responded to the leaflet were then given a copy of the school's brochure, a condensed version of the prospectus put together by Norma Lamont, Anne de Leeuw and Arlene Stamp:

the SATURDAY SCHOOL



**A MONDAY - FRIDAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CHARACTERIZED BY**

CREATIVE EXPRESSION as a starting point and
basis for learning.

The **WHOLE COMMUNITY** as a classroom.

CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING.

INTEGRATION of subject matter.

Natural **INQUIRY** and **DISCOVERY** approaches
to learning.

Freedom from rigid subject scheduling.

INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS in skill-related areas.

WHY AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL?

Alternative schools are essential for the fulfillment of educational philosophies acceptable to various groups of children and parents. Despite the decentralization of educational decision making, individual public schools find it impossible to meet the needs and expectations of all children and all parents.

PHILOSOPHY OF THIS SCHOOL

The principle of the proposed school is to encourage the natural growth of what is unique in each child and at the same time enable the child to relate to the society of which he is an integral member. It is our fundamental belief that this dual aim can best be achieved through an integrated curriculum based on creative experience.

We believe also that learning is enhanced when a real sense of community is developed. To accomplish this within the school, students, parents and teachers will participate together in the learning experience. This idea of community will not be confined to the internal aspects of the school - the school also hopes to make extensive use of the external environment.

PROGRAM OF THE SCHOOL

We will have an experienced Alberta Certified teacher whose philosophy of education is compatible with the aims of the school. An emphasis will be placed on the ability of the teacher to relate openly to children and adults and be sensitive to the needs of each child.

The teacher cannot be expected to carry this responsibility single-handedly. Other children, adult volunteers and special resource people will be used to enrich the learning experience. These resource people will be drawn from the parents and community at large.

The instructional goals of the school will be to encourage the development of the following:

1. A sense of self-confidence, a sense of self-reliance and a feeling of competence.

2. An awareness of and a responsibility to the human community and the natural environment.
3. Warm interpersonal relationships with peers and with people of other age groups.
4. Creative skills and talents.
5. The communicative and analytic skills.
6. A positive attitude towards learning and life.
7. Self-evaluation.

Because we will be a government-approved school, we will, of course, be subject to the same regulations and inspections with regard to curriculum and facilities as are the public schools.

ORGANIZATION

General direction of the school will be by parents, collectively. Meetings of the parents will be held frequently. As parents are essential to the general functioning of the school, a parent will contribute a minimum of one day a month at the school, or provide equivalent support (e.g. services or materials, etc.).

There will be an elected Board headed by a Director to manage the business aspects of the school and broad educational policy.

The teacher(s), in addition to being responsible for the management of the day to day instructional activities of the school, will be a member of the Board.

Pupil to adult ratio should not normally exceed 8: 1.

Pupil to teacher ratio should not normally exceed 24: 1.

We are committed to grouping children of mixed ages so that they will derive the benefits from interaction with a wide range of ages and abilities.

FINANCES

Initial membership fee will be \$25.00 per family.

Participating parents will purchase a minimum of one \$75.00 share in the school to provide for capital purchases and emergencies. The share fund may be borrowed from, and will be replenished from fees. Principal but not interest will be returned when participants leave the school: the shares will normally be repaid in August.

Monthly fees will be \$60.00 for one child, \$50.00 for a second child. Fees for additional children from one family may be reduced.

NOTES

Fees will be reduced, or scholarships provided, if subsidies are obtained. Although the school must ensure itself of viability, it will aim for a cosmopolitan composition, including a range of economic levels.

All parents will be interviewed to explain the philosophy of the school and to determine compatibility of the family and the school.

HISTORY

The idea of this school originated with a group of parents having like ideas about education who began meeting last winter. The school began this spring as a series of Saturday workshops which the children named "The Saturday School".

Original members were:

Starla Anderson
Audrey & Bob Christie
Anne & Gary de Leeuw
Pat & Norm Haring
Mike & Pat Hogan
Arlene & Bob Stamp
Ken & Una Sturdy
Rolf & Vera Ungstad

PRELIMINARY APPLICATION FORM

Name of Parent: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Names and Ages of Children:

Reason for wanting to enroll children:

Direct inquiries or send completed form to:

**Pat Hogan
4114 Stanley Road S.W.
CALGARY, Alberta**

T2S 2P6

N.B. Final acceptance subject to interview and \$25.00 deposit.

Long before this time, individual members of the group had been contacted by the news media, hungry for information about this new school that was proposed for September. But the group had heretofore resisted publicity, feeling that the ideas were too fragmentary yet to expose them to public scrutiny. However, the pressure of finding a sufficient number of children now persuaded the group to reassess its position, and in mid-June Bob Stamp drafted a publicity release which was distributed to city news media:

News Release

For Release at 10:00 a.m.,
June 20, 1972

AN EXPERIMENTAL PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR CALGARY

The Saturday School, an alternative elementary school stressing creative approaches to learning and an integrated curriculum, will open in Calgary in September.

Creative approaches to learning will include an emphasis on learning by doing and on all forms of self-expression such as painting, drama, and creative writing.

The traditional rigid break-down of curriculum will be abandoned in favor of an integrated, flexible approach to learning. Students will move both individually and in small groups through self-selected learning activities.

Field trips into the community and countryside will play a large part in the program.

The school will begin with 25 pupils ages five to 12 and one teacher. Through the use of resource people, volunteer teachers and parents, the student-adult ratio will not exceed eight to one. Parental involvement in the operation of the school will be essential.

The new school is sponsored by the Saturday School Society, a group of Calgarians committed to an open, creative approach to learning. The group will be registered under the Societies Act and will have provincial approval as a private school.

The name "Saturday School" arose from Saturday morning experimental sessions conducted by the group since April.

Information regarding registration for the Saturday School may be obtained from Audrey Christie, 287-2456, or Norma Lamont, 283-9324.

Both daily newspapers (the *Calgary Herald* and the *Albertan*) picked up the release, as did several radio and television stations. One radio station (*CKXL*) gave it considerable prominence over the next few days.

Albertan, June 22, 1972

Opens in September

Experimental school planned for Calgary

Parents 'to direct' new school

An elementary school directed by parents will open in Calgary in September.

The Saturday School will, despite its name, operate daily and will stress creative approaches to learning and an integrated curriculum.

It will begin with 25 students from 5 to 12 years old, and one teacher. Through the use of resource people, volunteer teachers and parents, the student-adult ratio will not exceed eight to one.

The group of parents setting up the school is now trying to rent space from either the public or the separate school board.

Dr. Robert Stamp, one of the parents involved and a professor in the faculty of education at the University of Calgary, says there will be an emphasis on learning by doing and on all forms of self-expression such as painting, drama, and creative writing.

The traditional rigid breakdown of curriculum will be abandoned in favor of an integrated, flexible approach to learning. Students will move individually and in small groups through self-selected learning activities.

Field trips into the community and the countryside will play a large part in the program.

The new school is sponsored by the Saturday School Society, a group of Calgarians who endorse an open, creative approach to learning. The group will be registered under the Societies Act and will have provincial approval as a private school.

Fees will be \$60 a month for one child, and \$50 a month for a second child in the same family.

The name Saturday School arises from Saturday morning experimental sessions conducted by the group since April.

Information about registration can be obtained from Audrey Christie, 287-2456, or Norma Lamont, 283-9324.

The Saturday School, a private elementary school stressing creative approaches to learning and an integrated curriculum, will open in Calgary in September.

The school will begin operation with 25 students aged five to 12 and one teacher. Through the use of resource people, volunteer teachers and parents, the student-adult ratio is planned not to exceed eight to one.

Saturday School is sponsored by the Saturday School Society, a group of Calgarians committed to an open, creative approach to learning. The group will be registered under the Societies Act and will have provincial approval as a private school.

The creative approaches to learning will include an emphasis on learning by doing and on all forms of self-expression such as painting, drama and creative writing.

"The traditional rigid breakdown of curriculum will be abandoned in favor of an integrated, flexible approach to learning. Students will move, both individually and in small groups, through self-selected learning activities," the society said.

Information regarding registration for the school may be obtained from Audrey Christie, 287-2456, or Norma Lamont, 283-9324.

Calgary Herald, June 21, 1972

The leaflets, brochures, media publicity, plus continued word-of-mouth publicity had the desired effect: more applications and memberships came in. (Publicity costs were borne by membership dues). As more and more new families became interested in the school it became necessary to hold parents' meetings, at which the ideas and philosophy of the group could be explained to newcomers. Two such meetings were held at the Unitarian Church, on June 12 and July 4. At the first of these meetings Bob Stamp began by outlining the philosophy of the group and Ken Sturdy followed with practical details on enrolment, staffing and financing. At the second meeting Audrey Christie, Ken Sturdy, and Brent Cameron all talked about the school. Margaret Fitch gave her impressions of one of these meetings. "I enjoyed it, found the members congenial, but was not completely satisfied with the presentation—especially the lack of details about the curriculum. I was left with some misgivings but certainly with continued interest."

While the school was gradually filling up with paid enrollees (children of families who had paid both the \$25 non-returnable membership fee and the \$75 debenture) consideration was also given to the possibility of providing places for children from low income families. This was of particular concern to Starla Anderson and Ron Low, both of whom wished to avoid the stigma of economic privilege, in that the school was primarily attended and run by members of the professional middle class. So Starla and Ron, along with John and Norma Lamont, began investigating sources of scholarship or bursary money: every child in the school would have to be supported there by some means. Unfortunately, they met with a negative response—potential donors seemed reluctant to invest in a project that was not yet off the ground.

July and August proved particularly hectic months for the enrolment committee. Pat Hogan bore the brunt of the responsibility for registration and interviewing, with assistance from Arlene Stamp, Audrey Christie and Brent Cameron. Although time-consuming and contributing to considerable nervous strain, most of the family interviews were quite pleasant. The majority of interested persons seemed to have philosophies and expectations compatible with the group, and the problem of saying "no" rarely arose. By the end of August 19 boys and nine girls were ready to begin attending the Saturday School, and we had reached three important objectives: legal organization as a society, the selection of a teacher, and the acquisition of students.

Finding a Building

The school building was the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle to be put in place. The difficulties in locating and confirming suitable accommodation for the permanent school were in direct contrast to the ease with which the Unitarian Church had been secured for the experimental Saturday sessions. Of course, the society had high expectations for any permanent building: a bright, cheerful atmosphere conducive to learning, enough space without seeming barn-like, adequate facilities for craft work as well as academic work, plenty of playground space, and, above all, a reasonable rent.

The building committee, led by Audrey Christie and Arlene Stamp, began its search in earnest during April and May. Various sites were visited, inspected, and ultimately discarded for reasons of insufficient space or unreasonable rent—an old pump house that the City of Calgary had leased to a drama group, old Alberta Government Telephone buildings no longer in use, church basements, the old Mount Royal College building, old grocery stores and fire halls, the old YMCA building, various unused schools owned by either the public or separate school boards.

In the end the choice was narrowed down to two buildings: the Unitarian Church and the Sunalta Cottage School. Although the Unitarian Church had proven adequate for the Saturday morning sessions, there were doubts as to its feasibility for permanent quarters. Members of the group were worried about its dark, cavernous nature, and about having to share the premises with the church itself. Besides, the building might be sold suddenly; the Unitarians had been trying to dispose of it for some months. On the other hand, the Sunalta Cottage School, owned by the Public School Board, seemed to possess many advantages: it was structurally sound, self-contained with a bright interior, and had outside play space surrounding it.

Sunalta Cottage School was centrally located at 1706 - 12th Avenue S.W., with rapid access from the near-north and southwest sides of the city, and reasonable access from other areas. It was a square, two-storey building of frame construction built in 1912 as a temporary school to accommodate elementary-aged youngsters from the then-new community of Sunalta while permanent schools were being erected elsewhere in town. The Public School Board had continued to operate

several of these "cottage" schools throughout the city, extending their original two-year operating life by as much as 40 years in the case of Sunalta. Some had been used for grade one and two pupils, so that young children would not have to walk far from home in cold weather, while others had been used for special education classes. But as inner city populations declined, and the buildings aged, the board had ceased using them for educational purposes. By 1972 some of these cottage schools were used for storage purposes; others were rented to charitable and community organizations. Would the board be willing to let the Saturday School Society have Sunalta School?

Bob Stamp appeared before the board's building and finance committee on June 14 to request a year's lease on the school for a monthly rental of \$175 — 200. The anticipated controversy failed to materialize as the trustees voted unanimously to permit the proper officials to enter into negotiations with the society. One trustee attempted to discover the group's philosophy of education: "Probably to teach kids how to make bombs," he whispered under his breath, but the chairman ruled him out of order on the grounds that the item should be treated as a "straight business proposition."

Unfortunately, the support of the trustees was not matched initially by the board administrators. During the early part of July, Pat Hogan and Brent Cameron encountered roadblock after roadblock as the negotiations proceeded: seemingly unreasonable demands from fire and other building inspectors, seemingly unreasonable cost estimates for putting the building in shape. At one point it appeared that the society would have to pay a total of \$4231 to have school board employees do the necessary renovations. In the depths of despair on July 20th, Bob Stamp fired off an angry letter to Trustee Scott Saville, chairman of the board's building and finance committee, demanding reasonable figures.

Then suddenly it was a case of moving from darkest night to brightest day. On July 25th, Bob and Arlene Stamp, Audrey Christie, and Brent Cameron had a final meeting with the board administrators. The atmosphere had changed. No, the group did not have to attend to all the suggested renovations. Yes, the group could employ their own workers to carry out whatever renovations they wished. Yes, the rent would be reasonable: merely a token sum of one dollar a year. Members of the group were speechless; it was all we could do to mumble words of thanks. No one could quite fathom why the atmosphere suddenly changed. Was it due to the interest of School Superintendent

Carl Safran? Was it due to the threatened intervention of Trustee Scott Saville? Was it a means of getting the Christies and the Stamps off the backs of the board and administrators? In any case, as Una Sturdy recalled later, "That formidable dragon, the Calgary Public School Board, turned out to be a co-operative, peaceable dragon."

The Saturday School Society took possession of Sunalta Cottage School on Tuesday, August 1st—five weeks before the scheduled beginning of classes. "Oh boy! It's really going to happen now," was how Pat Hogan recalled her first impression of the building. However, considerable renovating had to be undertaken before it could "really happen". The Tuesday evening meetings, plus every other spare minute of the week for many in the group, became times for physical rather than mental work. Each day it seemed as if there were more jobs to do. As one job was completed, another two or three would materialize.

The renovation scheme involved carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work; bookcases and tables to be built, porches and stairways to be repaired, floors to be sanded and polished, a kitchen and a teacher's office to be constructed, supplies and equipment to be moved in, the outside yard to be cleaned up, the furnace room to be enclosed with fireproof material, sinks and toilets to be put into working order. Above all, there was painting—walls, shelves, trim around windows and doorways, tables, benches, stools, porches. "I personally re-learned how to paint," declared Margaret Fitch. The painting turned out to be an easy way to introduce newcomers to the group: anyone poking his head inside the front door was immediately given a paint brush! "We had fun working together, and we got to know each other much better," recalled Margaret.

Of course, the work parties were not all sweetness and light. "People got tired and frustrated and perhaps felt they were neglecting home commitments," said Margaret. A general weariness seemed to overtake the group at this point. In part it was due to the fact that most of the members had been pouring all their extra energies into the school project since April. With the exception of Brent Cameron, and his wife Joan, who maintained their enthusiasm and productivity throughout the summer, the group sought relief in vacations and neglected household work. They were simply exhausted.

There was also the pressure of school opening day getting closer and closer with so much yet to do. And the problem of organization. "People were coming to help and there was no one there to advise them what to do," recalled Norma Lamont. "There was no single person who knew all the things that needed to be done. And people weren't cleaning up after themselves—there were paint brushes and rags left all over the place."

Midway through August Ben Gadd stepped in and assumed responsibility for directing the renovations work. (Ben's efforts in whipping the building into shape were recognized later, when he was unanimously chosen for the position of building superintendent.) "Ben's persuasion and firm hand were marvellous," recalled Ruth Thompson. "He gave people specific instructions and bullied them a bit. Before that, people would wander around with dripping paint brushes hoping that all would go well. Ben relieved that feeling and gave us the necessary structure."

Paint, lumber, and other construction materials were donated or purchased at reduced rates from friendly suppliers, located and wheedled politely by David Thompson, an architect. No matter what we needed, David could get it for us either wholesale or free of charge. We also had help in bringing the antiquated wiring in the building up to date: David Wyer, an electronics instructor at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, supervised this aspect. Plumbing problems arose at the last minute, when an inspector casually condemned the entire pipe system as illegal—even dangerous! (Fortunately, he allowed the school to open during the course of alterations; we were able to obtain apprentice plumber Tom Mathieson to do the work at a very reasonable rate.)

As the renovations neared completion, academic supplies and equipment began to roll into the school. Members of the society had been gathering materials throughout the spring months, and basements and garages had begun to overflow. Individuals in the group had proven themselves in the art of soliciting gifts and scrounging supplies. Vera Ungstad stood apart in the scrounging category, when she picked up approximately 1000 pounds of clay scraps discarded by art students. Paper and books, typewriters, chairs, benches, a piano, stove, and refrigerator; chess sets, an aquarium and a microscope, rock collections and shell collections—the supplies came in until the building could hold no more.

Opening day had practically arrived when many members of the society realized that so much time had been spent on the building that very little time remained for curriculum planning. Although curriculum committees had been established on July 11th to act as resource and idea banks for the teacher, many of the committees had met infrequently during July and August. For the most part their work did not get beyond the stage of identifying necessary materials and possible activities; no formal curriculum or program planning was accomplished.

But there did not seem to be time for these activities as everyone laboured to get the building in shape. Tuesday, September 5th, was the original target date for opening, consistent with that of the public schools. But by Labour Day weekend it was obvious that all would not be ready—a week's delay was inevitable.

On Monday, September 11th, the Saturday School opened its doors for business. Only eight months had passed since the idea took root in January.

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