

Victoria High School celebrates centennial year

JEFF BELL / TIMES COLONIST
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Grade 12 girls at Vic High stepped into the past Wednesday, recreating a photograph taken at the school's Girls Entrance in 1914.

Boys and girls had designated entrances at the time, a practice that faded away long ago, but the signs are still intact.

About 95 students took part in the photo shoot, joined by a few teachers and school officials.

The original, which is in the B.C. Archives, had 161 people and likely included the entire complement of girls attending what was then a brand-new school.

Wednesday's event was part of an effort to usher in the centennial year at the Fernwood campus of Vic High, or Victoria High School.

Principal Randi Falls said the idea of redoing the 1914 picture came from volunteer archivists at the school.

There is so much to marvel at in the school's past, she said. "The history in this school humbles me."

Vic High is, in fact, 137 years old, she said. It dates back to Aug. 7, 1876, when 12 girls and 22 boys attended classes in a log building on the grounds of what is now Central Middle School.

Falls said students are starting to realize the significance of the centennial year.

"They're getting it now. I've been talking about it quite a bit with them and I think it's sort of starting to sink in."

The girls were eager to be part of the picture, she said.

"They were genuinely pleased, and the boys didn't feel slighted because our message was that a lot of the boys back then would have been involved with the war effort or getting ready for it."

She said the school's attic was used as a firing range for cadets during the First World War.

The 1914 school opening drew plenty of attention from the Daily Colonist, which carried a story calling the facility "the finest institution of its kind west of the Great Lakes."

“Prior to and following the ceremonies,” the story continued, “many of those present took the occasion to walk through and admire the splendid structure, which has been completed at cost of, in round figures, \$500,000.00.”

Centennial activities will be concentrated in May 2014 — the school opened in May 1914 — starting with an Illustrious Alumni Dinner on the Thursday before the Victoria Day long weekend. Graduates being honoured include athlete Jessica Munro (class of 1984), First Nations artist Richard Hunt (1971), author Maria Tippett (1962) and sportswriter Jim Taylor (1955).

Graduates can get information about taking part in centennial events at vichigh.com, the Victoria High School Alumni Association website.

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