

35 YEARS OF LOVING



Staff photo by David Clark
Teacher Alice Sears gathers her pupils around for a story.

The first flickering of Alice Sears' ambition to become a teacher goes back to her time as a tearfully timid girl in Grade 1.

That was some 60 years ago in Miss West's class at Bridgeport Road elementary in Richmond.

"I was so shy and frightened that my sister had to take me home," said Mrs. Sears.

"My mother took me back. The class was singing Ba Ba Black Sheep and Miss West put her arms around me.

"She held my hands, clapping in time to the music. I was fine after that and I never forgot Miss West's love and kindness."

The occasion for such fond remembering is that Mrs. Sears is retiring after 35 years as a teacher.

When she cleans out her desk at Elgin school on June 28, she will become the last of the one-room school teachers in Surrey.

It is nicely appropriate that Elgin and Mrs. Sears are bowing out together.

The little green school house on 144th Street will close at the end of the month.

Built in 1921, it is a Surrey heritage site. But in school budget lingo, it is no longer cost effective with only 13 kids in Grade 1 and 2 this term.

Elgin has never had much in the way of slick audio-visual devices found at bigger schools.

But there is an old Yamaha piano. School days always starts there with Mrs. Sears at the keyboard and kids gathered round for the singing. Yes, one of their songs is Ba Ba Black Sheep.

Two Sundays ago, some 200 parents, school board brass and former students came bearing gifts at the retirement sendoff for Mrs. Sears.



Elgin's only teacher for 19 years.

They made it clear that Mrs. Sears is something of a heritage herself.

"She is a loving touching person who knows when a child needs a hug," said one of the parents.

"She always gave her pupils a good start by stressing values and the three Rs and teaching them to help one another.

Afterward, Mrs. Sears allowed that the three Rs and discipline are important in teaching children. But there's something else — the Miss West ingredient.

"Kindness and love are what really count," Mrs. Sears said.

The nice part of it all is that Elgin school probably hasn't seen the last of Alice Sears.

There are plans to use Elgin as a centre for pre-school children and hire Mrs. Sears as a house mother.

"I'd like that," she said.

"But it would have to be part time. I need a little time for myself now."