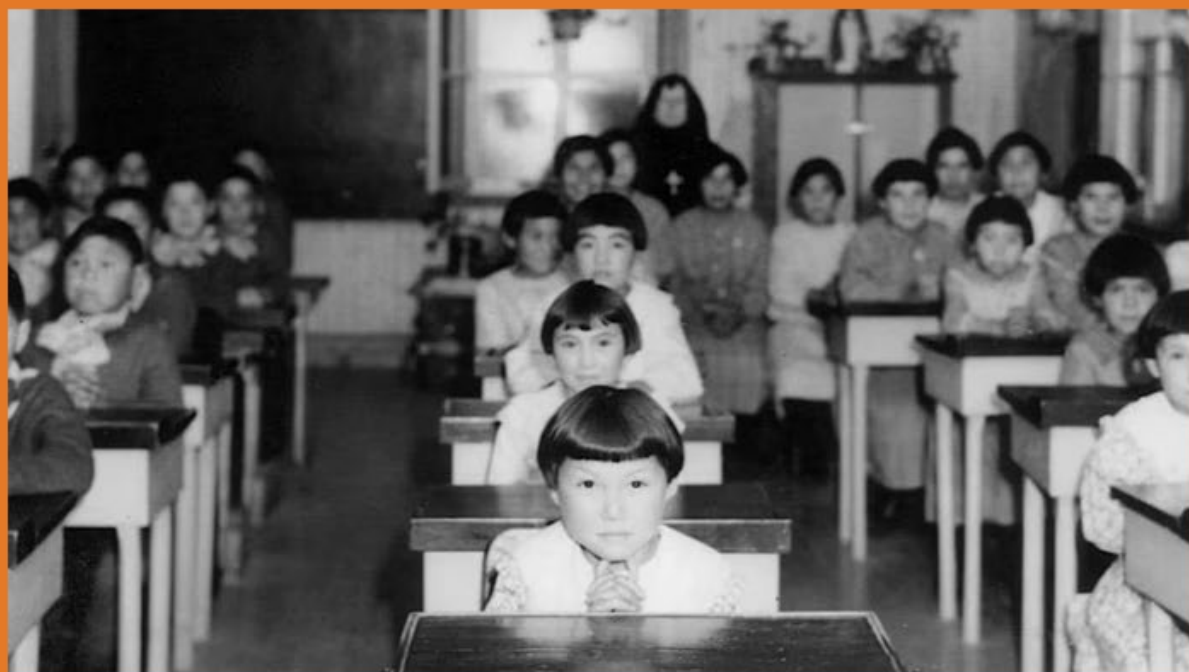


David Webster, ed

Canada's Residential Schools

Research by Bishop's University students



Amos Residential School

The **Amos Indian Residential School** was a Canadian residential school in Quebec, Canada. The school was for Anicinapek and Atikamekw Nehirowisiw children, and operated from 1955 to 1973. It was created by the Canadian federal government and run by the Catholic Church. The school was built in the municipality of Saint-Marc-de-Figuery on the traditional territory of the Anicinape Nation. All buildings associated with the school have since been demolished.^[1]

History

When the school was opened the government also set up a farm school, but by 1958 all the livestock for the school had been sold off.^[2]

The school had a scandal in 1966 when the priest who worked at the school, Edmond Brouillard, was convicted of sexually abusing six children.^[3]

In 2013 survivors of the school came together with the Abitibiwinni First Nation Council and built a monument to the school's history and to act as a form of healing for the survivors of the school.^[1]

Two bronze plaques were unveiled as a part of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in 2024, as the federal government recognized the historical significance of the school. The minister of the environment and climate change Steven Guilbeault announced the unveiling of the two plaques.^[4]

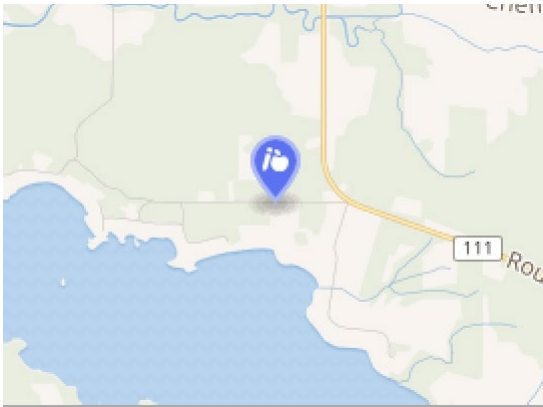
There has been no officially recognized deaths related to the Saint-Marc-de-Figuery residential school but survivors have different memories with one survivor saying that at least three children disappeared never to be seen again. Another survivor recounts going to funeral-like events for children of the school.^[5]

Amos Indian Residential School



Amos Indian Residential School (1955-1973),
date unknown

Location



Saint-Marc-de-Figuery, Quebec
Canada
48.4431574°N 78.0493133°W

Information

Type	Canadian Indian residential school
Religious affiliation	Catholic
Established	1955
Closed	1973
Authority	Catholic Church in Canada
Oversight	Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

Administration and management

Gender	Coed
Enrollment	200
Language	English

In 1955 the school was administered by the Oblates and Grey Sisters. Then in 1962 the federal government had an agreement with the Oblate Indian and Eskimo Commission on management of the school. April 1, 1969, the Federal government had decided to administer until September where the government gave it to the local school district.^[2]

Post WW2 Residential school

Unlike previous residential schools, many of the new residential schools like Amos were developed in Quebec after World War II to develop the population of Mid-North Quebec for Indigenous people living in the region. Another goal of the government was to increase the number of Indigenous people attending schools. In the case of Amos, the construction of a new residential school was part of the local population growth and parents desiring an education for their children.^[6]

Oblates and Grey Sisters

The Oblates in the 1940s had tried persuading the Department of Indian Affairs that it be mandatory for students to attend school. Once convinced, the government had the Oblates manage the school along with the Grey Sisters. The goal was for these children to be raised with Catholic faith and values. The Oblates had a style of teaching that was strict and harsh, especially compared to what Indigenous students were used to. They protested that they were not eradicating indigenous culture and also denying full responsibility of the sexual abuse happening at the school. The staff from the church in the schools had priests, nuns and lay teachers.^[7]

Operation of the school

The curriculum had standard classes like math and French. They had access to workshops such one for students farming.^[7] Sports were part of school for further assimilation.^[6]

French had to be learned quickly because the staff had no knowledge of Indigenous languages, except for the supervisor. Religious learning was focused on faith, with students not allowed to speak their language unless doing religious practices such as praying. The supervisor showed this with announcements made for prayer in the school in the students' Indigenous languages. Students had their clothing, hair and names changed. Boys and girls were separated for most of the time during school. Students were also not allowed to leave the school. Students lived at the school for most of the year only being able to see and live with their family at Christmas and the summer.^[7]

Children who attended the school

The children who attended the school came from the Anicinapek and Atikamekw Nehirowisiw peoples. The Anicinapek from southwest Quebec and the Atikamekw Nehirowisiw from the Mauricie region.^[1]

According to Bousquet (2006), residential schools were originally intended “to take in children from ages 7 to 14. In fact, it would later welcome children from 6 (sometimes younger) to 16.”^[7]

The children who were forced to attend this school were abused and made to follow strict rules in order to silence their language and their culture. This led to a loss of identity for many survivors who attended the school.^[1]

Generally the school consistently was enrolling over 200 students at the school.^[2]

Abuse and hardships experienced by students

Many of the students faced difficulty in school. Part of this was getting used to different lifestyles, structures and social structures being completely different from home. Students had the impression of having been treated with no respect with staff having to deal with mistreatment, malnourishment, physical abuse, mental abuse and sexual abuse. Meanwhile, students would be punished. This included not being fed, beaten or locked up in closets.^[7]

Abuse was found in the hockey team having players beat for losing.^[6]

Resistance by students and parents

Students tried to protest by not eating or telling their parents about the event but without effect.^[7]

One student ran away twice and was stopped by the police.^[8] Another student had planned an escape plan to leave school. After he escaped and met his parents, they brought him back to the school.^[3]

One student who experienced sexual abuse left school and brought back twice by the police, until their father believed them and they moved away. Another child had their parents hide them in order to protect them.^[8]

Impacts on students and parents

The survivors of the school reported abuse that affected their identity, skills and culture. Skills that were named by one survivor included the ability to hunt, fish, and to understand their own position within their culture. Survivors noted that there was sexual abuse at the school.^[3]

It affected their ability to live back home and also connect with their families after not having been taught the same skills and knowledge. Parents spoke of feeling betrayed by the school. They had accepted it in order to learn. However, they did not think their children would be gone for so long and that they would be abused by staff that they trusted to take care of their children.^[8]

Media coverage, accusations and interviews from survivors

The school is accused of having hidden child deaths, with the CBC reporting accounts from multiple survivors and including a disturbing photograph. Reportedly, a meningitis outbreak led to one child death, but there were no official deaths recorded. No found additional sources confirm whether the claim has been rejected or accepted by any institutions.^[5]

The CBC has also reported on the effects of the schools on children who were hidden to avoid sending them to school, who had to live in less than normal conditions in order to stay away.^[8]

Finally, survivors have spoken of abuse at the school including a report on a member of staff named Édmond Brouillard being convicted for sexually abusing children.^[3]

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Assiniboia Residential School

Assiniboia Residential School was a Canadian Indian residential school that was located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was active from 1958 to 1973, housing Indigenous children from all over Canada, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwestern Ontario. The school was run and managed by the Oblates Father of Mary Immaculate and the Grey Nuns.

Now, the Assiniboia Residential School site is a memorial facility and a gathering place.

History

Building

Prior to being a residential school, the building was first built in 1915 and used as a children's home. After the children's home moved to another place, the building became a veterans' hospital^[1] and later a residential school.

Assiniboia Residential School first opened in 1958, making it one of the 15 residential schools in Manitoba.^[2] It was the second residential school in the province, the first being in Lebret.^[3] The Assiniboia Residential School was high school-level and housed Indigenous students until 1967, when it became a hostel which housed students from faraway homes attending local public and Catholic high schools.^[3]

There were no structural changes until 1965, when the Taubensee Construction Company created a gymnasium on the south side of the school. In the 1980s the building was demolished to build a new RCMP forensic science laboratory.^[4]

Name

When it was founded until 1967 the school was called the Assiniboia Residential School. In 1966 it was also called the Assiniboia Indian Residential High School. When the building became a hostel in 1967, its name changed to Assiniboia Hostel until 1968. Assiniboia Student Residence was the final name of the establishment from 1968 until it shut down completely in 1973.^[5]

Land

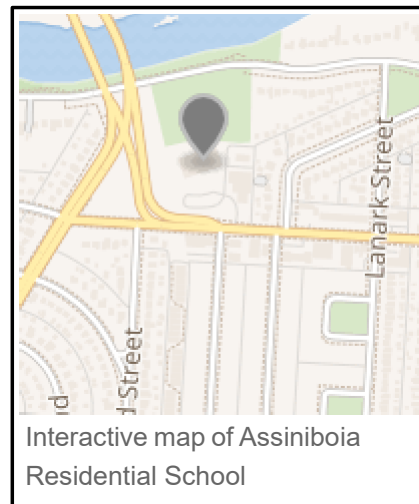
The Assiniboia Residential School was located on "Treaty No. 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Anisininewuk, Dene, and Dakota, and the homeland of the Red River Métis."^[1]

The address of Assiniboia Residential School was 621 Academy Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba. This was close to downtown, and the Assiniboine River. It was located in the prosperous neighbourhood of River Heights.^[6]

Managed and funded

The school was managed by the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate and the Grey Nuns.^{[7][6]} The Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate ran the school from 1958 to 1969, and the Grey Nuns helped run the school between 1961 and 1967.^[5]

Like most residential schools in Canada, Assiniboia Residential School was funded by the government.^[6] The Grey Nuns were in charge of grocery shopping for both the students and staff with a generous budget for the low number of students enrolled. Many of the recipients mention how the food was better than most residential schools, and this was because of the Grey Nuns, who prioritized nutrition for the students.^[8]



Principal

Father Omer Robidoux was the school's only principal.^[9] Working alongside him were the "Manitoba's Grey Nuns, who were tasked with supervising the girls, running the infirmary and taking care of the school and its students" until 1970.^[3]

Students and enrollment

The Assiniboia Residential School had over 1000 students who attended through the years 1958 to 1973.^[10] These students were between the ages of 15 and 20.^[7] The population of the school varied per year, but its final year 1972-1973 had the lowest enrollment of 25.^[5] Previous years had enrollment averages of about 100 students.^[6]

Many students who attended Assiniboia Residential School came from faraway, some from more than 800 km distance.^[7] Students attended from many provinces in Canada, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northwestern Ontario. "Roughly 85 First Nations [pupils] were forced to attend and live at this federal institution," according to [Parks Canada](#).^[1]

Several students transferred to this school because their prior residential school, such as Fort Alexander, Sandy Bay, and Norway House, did not include secondary education.^[3]

Life at Assiniboia

Activities

Assiniboia Residential School had no extracurricular activities during its first year. However, the following year of 1959 the school created and registered hockey teams that were composed of young men in the Greater Winnipeg Minor Hockey Association leagues. As the surrounding area of the school consisted of reservations, the hockey team consisted of [Ojibway](#), [Oji-Cree](#), [Sioux First Nations](#), and [Cree](#) people.^[11]

The school enrolled the hockey team into the MAHA playdowns, after a year of being in the league. The Assiniboia hockey team went on to be the Manitoba Junior B Champions in 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1964. In 1963 the hockey team was still competing in the MAHA playdowns but in the Junior C division, and they won and became champions of that division.^[11]

At the beginning when the school was opened, students were experiencing separation and loneliness. As time went on and years passed, this started to change. Students were getting the chance to participate in different activities, such as sports teams, shopping downtown and work programs.^[7]

Grades

The Assiniboia Residential School originally consisted of four classrooms for grades 8 to 10. This changed in 1959 and 1960 as they expanded their school and added in Grade 11 and Grade 12. Eventually the school began to shut down starting with Grades 8 in 1962 and then 9 in 1965. This was the slow closure of the school that later happened in 1973.^[5]

Closure

Assiniboia Residential School officially closed on July 25, 1973.^{[3][8]} There were a few different reasons behind this decision, the main one being new policies on residential schools in which the Canadian government shifted towards ending isolation of Indigenous children from their families.^[3]

Another factor was the decline of enrollment, with only 25 student enrolled in the final school year (1972-1973), a significant decline from the residential school's average annual number of 105 students.^[5]

Legacy and reconciliation

Former Students

Many former students have made comments on the Assiniboia Residential School about how "different" it was compared to most residential schools. Some students reported that life at Assiniboia was a breath of fresh air, "where students began to peak out of a dark place", and recognize that life among non-Indigenous peoples was possible.^[8] These students said Assiniboia Residential School had a "more supportive environment", where they were offered higher quality food, opportunities to participate in high-level extracurricular activities, like the hockey team, and better health opportunities.^[1] Others were "damaged by their early childhood incarceration that their lives were lost in early adulthood."^{[8][12]}

Mabel Horton (*née Hart*), a former student of Assiniboia Residential School, is now a co-president of the Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group. Mabel attended the school for a total of 5 years, starting in Grade 8 until Grade 12 when she graduated.^[8] She explains how her experience was "OK", considering she "wasn't physically abused, sexually abused, or otherwise."^[8] Although Mabel had a "good" experience, many students at other residential schools did not have the same experience.

The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group

The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group is "a non-profit organization that honors the legacy of the Assiniboia Residential School through commemorative and educational activities."^[13] It was formed by a group of former students who had met at a reunion in 2017, plus some local settlers.^{[10][13]}

The Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group, along side with the government, and a few local architects, came together to create a meaningful memorial and commemorative monument site.

Reconciliation

The Manitoba government partnered with the Assiniboia Residential School Legacy Group to fund and build a memorial and commemorative monument site located on the site of the Assiniboia Residential School to honor the students who attended.^[13]

Within this memorial and commemorative monument site is the name of every child who attended the Assiniboia Residential School inscribed on a brick placed in a circle, with their communities' names inscribed on pillars that surround the circle.^[10] The pillars are in the colours of the four directions (<http://www.bing.com/search?q=native+american+four+directions+colors&form=ANNTTH1&refig=69dde27d433c423ba832707e08ba6511&pc=U531&pq=the+colors+of+the+four+directions&pqlth=33&assgl=38&sgcn=native+american+four+directions+colors&qs=Nm&sgtpv=Nm&smvpcn=0&swbcn=10&sctcn=0&sc=10-33&sp=1&ghc=0&cvid=69dde27d433c423ba832707e08ba6511&clckatsg=1&hsmssg=0>), and there is a fire in the center of the circle for gatherings and opportunities for offerings.^{[10][12]}

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Blue Quills Residential School

Blue Quills Residential School, also known as *Sacred Heart Indian Residential School* or *Saddle Lake Boarding School*, was first established in the late 19th century and located near Saddle Lake Cree Nation, in present-day Alberta, Canada.^[1] This school operated through the 20th century and was initially run by the Roman Catholic Church, it was funded and overseen by the federal government. Later, the facility transitioned to increase federal control, primarily during the 1930s to 1950s. In addition, Blue Quills had become the first residential school in Canada to be transferred and administered by Indigenous people.^[2]

Part of the Canadian Indian residential school system aimed to assimilate Indigenous children by separating them from their families, culture, and language. Furthermore, attendance was made mandatory under the amendments to the *Indian Act* in 1920, subjecting the children to manual labour over traditional academic education.^[3] This school has also been documented as having experiences of abuse, extremely poor living condition and cultural suppression. It was then commemorated through survivor testimonies and projects like the Witness Blanket.^[3]

In the late 1920s, plans were made to construct a new, larger Blue Quills school that would be located closer to transportation (rail ways) and accommodate a greater number of students. In 1928, a fire broke out at the school which accelerated their plans for reconstruction.^[2] In 1930, construction began on the new Blue Quills Residential School near the area of St. Paul, Alberta.^[2] This ultimately lead to the official opening of the school in 1931.^[2] This new building was government-owned and unlike the original school, marked a shift toward stronger government control and decision-making.^[2]

Blue Quills Residential School Timeline

Key historical events

1892	Order in Council passed regulating funding of church-operated schools
1893–1896	
1897	Land disputes begin between Saddle Lake Band and Blue Quills Band
1898–1899	
1900	Principal correspondence reflects attitudes toward student illness
1901	
1902	Disputes over school location continue
1903–1909	
1910	Parents begin raising concerns about school conditions
1911–1912	
1913	Formal complaints reported
1914–1918	
1919	Typhoid epidemic causes deaths
1920	Indian Act amended making attendance mandatory
1921	
1922	Expansion plans proposed
1923	
1924	Continued expansion efforts
1925	Reserve land surrendered to settlers
1926–1927	
1928	Fire destroys original school
1929	
1930	Construction of new school begins
1931	New school opens; children transferred
1932	Parents forced to send children under threat of police
1933	
1934	Request for extended holidays denied
1935–1936	
1937	Holiday period extended
1938–1949	
1950	Increased federal control (approx. 1950s)
1951–1956	
1957	End of Order in Council
1958–1969	
1970	Indigenous occupation leads to transfer of control

Church Influence and Governance in Alberta

In 1934, the principal Joseph Angin requested that the school be granted a two-month holiday, but the federal government denied the request, maintaining the standard limit of forty-three days of holidays without exceptions.^[4] It was not until 1937 that the vacation period was formally extended to two months.^[4]

Over time, particularly in the 1950s, federal control increased as the influence of the church declined. However, the church remained responsible for providing educational services to Indigenous children. Moreover, the Order in Council, passed in 1892 and in effect until 1957, established regulations for financing church-operated schools, books and supplies were paid solely by the government. As a result, education at the time was a joint responsibility of the government and church, both of which believed 'civilization' could be achieved by educating and ministering to indigenous children as a separate and isolated group. In the residential school, this isolation from other religious denominations, as well as from their home communities, and non-Indigenous students was absolute. This partnership aimed to assimilate Indigenous peoples through isolation, using education and religious catholic instruction as a means of separating children from their families and communities.^[2]

Between 1913 and 1920, Indigenous parents formally reported complaints to the Indian agent; However, their concerns were largely dismissed by the principal.^[2] The state inspectors reported satisfaction within the school, despite clear evidence of malnutrition, due to inadequate food.^[2] Medical staff also noted serious health issues among children.^[2] In one documented case, a 13-year-old girl became pregnant, raising concerns about the lack of protection and supervision in the school.^[2] As a result, Indigenous parents concerns were ignored and they had no voice in the decisions that affected their child.

The Indian Act was amended in the year 1920.^[2] This act was formed to make school attendance mandatory for indigenous children aged between 7 to 15^[2]. Significantly, increasing government control and forcing children into residential schools.^[2] In addition, between 1922 and 1924, church officials pushed to expand Blue Quills proposing a larger facility capable of accommodating up to 200 students.^[2] The primary objective was to admit younger children and extend the mandatory ages to keep children enrolled, up to the ages of 16–18.^[2]

Family and Parental Control

Around 1910, indigenous parents began expressing concerns about their children's schooling.^[2] Stating that they felt their children were "not learning anything" and teachers were using harsh punishments.^[2] At the time however, parents still believed education was important and wanted better learning conditions for their children.^[2] As the years progressed and church authority strengthened, parents had little to no decision-making power regarding their children. In 1932, a journal entry from Blue Quills institution recorded that parents were compelled by authorities to send their children to school under threat of police intervention; while some complied with the order, others resisted.^[4]

Several decades later, in 1970, First Nations parents and community members occupied the Blue Quills Residential School in protest against the federal government and administration.^[5] The protest was driven by long-standing dissatisfaction with the school's administration and opposition to government integration policies. As well as plans to convert the school into a residence and send students to a public school.^[5] The occupation, which lasted over two weeks, involved a large numbers of participants.^[5] The

protest concluded with the federal government agreeing to transfer control of the school to the Blue Quills Native Education Council, marking a significant shift toward Indigenous self-determination in education.^[5]

Inside the Residential School

From 1930 to the early 1950's a typical day program at Blue Quills School would be a half-day of school and half-day of work for children over the age of 10.^[2] Their day began at 6 am, children woke up around 6:20 am to pray then at 7:15 am they had breakfast. At 7:40 am it was time for students to make their beds, at 7:50 am housework began, at 8:10 am they had recreation time. Their school day began at 8:55 am, at 10:15-10:30 am students have recess, at 11:45 am to noon intermission. On Wednesdays and Fridays at 11:30, there is singing class for the boys. Tuesdays and Thursdays is singing for the girls in their playroom. At 12:00 pm the students have lunch and Angelus is recited, then at 12:30 pm to 1:15 pm recreation again and at 1:25 pm students are back in class. They get a break from 2:45 pm to 3:00 pm and their school day ends at 4:00 pm. After school, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are appointed for the girls and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays are appointed for the boys. Children have dinner at 6 pm, pray at 6:30 pm and the younger children go to bed at 7:30 pm and the older ones at 8:45 pm. During this time all children were forced to speak English during and outside of class time. ^[2]

In terms of bathroom routine, it was important that the children stayed "modest" at all times. "boys were compelled to go to the shower room in groups of twelve, and "everyone must go in each shower dressed and should come out from there dressed too." ^[2] Moreover, a testimony from one of the students stated that: they would get showers only once a week on Fridays. There were just bathtubs in little rooms that had a door on them.^[2] They were forced to wear a "bathing suit" similar to a grey flannelette gown and could not take it off. ^[2]

Experience of Students

While many student experiences were documented, available records provide only partial account of life within the school. In the early 1930s, records document the punishment of three girls who had run away.^[4] Allegations included the use of a rawhide whip, confinement in an outdoor toilet, and inappropriate treatment related to menstruation. School officials denied that these punishments were excessive.^[4] Although government officials expressed concern about the disciplinary practices of the principal, no formal investigation was conducted and he remained in his position.^[4] Records from the same period also indicate ongoing disciplinary issues at the school, including staff using excessive force and frequent instances of students attempting to run away, for which they recieved strict punishments for.^[4]

Student experiences were also shaped by displacement and dislocation.^[2] On December 7, 1931, approximately 84 children were transferred from their older school on the reserve to the new facility.^[2] The move was reported to have caused fear, confusion and homesickness for the children.^[2] Overall, children experienced feelings of isolation from being separated from their culture, identity and more specifically their families and homes. Many children entered residential schools with little to no knowledge of English and were not premitted to use their Cree language. Students were assigned identification numbers, which were used to label their clothing and lockers. They had limited personal autonomy, and failure to follow rules, even minor ones would result in punishment. ^[6]

In addition to these experiences, the principle of the school reflects harsh institutional attitudes toward students, particularly in relation to illness and mortality. In one instance, the principal expressed concern that allowing a sick student to return home to die on her reserve would negatively affect the school. There were numerous documented health concerns, including a significant health crisis within the institution: "When an epidemic of typhoid fever struck at Blue Quills School in December 1919, it resulted in the death of two nuns, five children, and an unknown number of people on the Saddle Lake reserve." [2]

Legacy, Commemoration and Survivors

The history and experiences of students at Blue Quills Residential School will never be forgotten and are commemorated in part through works like the Witness Blanket. This art piece has taken valuable objects from different residential schools and puzzled it onto a blanket.^[3] The one from the Quills school, consists of student proficiency badges. Students would receive badges for cooking, sewing, weaving, knitting, housekeeping, gardening, leather work, dairying and poultry raising.^[3] These badges reflect the emphasis by the Canadian government on manual labour over academics.^[3] According to survivor, Emma Gladue, these badges were earned through abuse and slavery.^[3]

Survivor testimonies further reveals the strict control over communication between students and their families. Mary Francois, a residential school survivor, recalled that children were obliged to write identical letters saying that they were doing fine and that they were being well taken care of.^[1] These letters, were copied from the black board and sent out by the nuns, limiting authentic communication and hiding the realities of students experiences.^[1] Madeleine Dion Stout, reported achieving academic success but does not attribute this success to the school. Instead, she credits her upbringing, including the values and guidance provided by her family and community.^[5] Velma Jackson, described long term impacts of her experience at Blue Quills. Many of her peers died due to factors such as alcoholism, exploitation, or accidents. She also reported lasting trauma, including difficulty wearing dresses, and characterized the school environment as unsafe, including allegations of abuse.^[5]

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Carcross Residential School

Carcross Residential School (Chooutla Residential School) The Chooutla Residential School was the first of its kind in Yukon. Run by the Anglican church and Canadian government, it operated between 1903 and 1969 and housed over 1000 children that were forced to undergo cultural assimilation and abuse.^[1]

History

1903 – First residential school established in Carcross, students were moved from Forty Mile.

1911 – Official Chooutla school was built, it was larger and more formal school building.

1939 – School was destroyed by a fire; temporary arrangements were set up until a new building was ready.

1944 – Original school building was rebuilt.

1953 – A new and larger school was built that could hold more students.

1969 – The residential school closed ^[1]

Operation and purpose

Established by Bishop William Bompas and Bishop Isaac Stringer, the school was operated by the Anglican Church of Canada. Carcross was funded by the federal government through the Indian Affairs branch.^[2] The purpose of the school was assimilation: to remove Indigenous children from their families, erase language, culture and traditions, and force them to act “white”.^[3]

The school was known for unhealthy conditions, brutal discipline, lack of proper food, and harsh, uncomfortable living spaces. ^[1]

Life at Carcross

At Carcross, mornings were devoted to academics such as reading and writing, while afternoons were dedicated to manual labor tasks. Boys were assigned to chop wood, fishing, and carpentry, while girls were assigned to cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Due to the harsh winter conditions in Yukon, wood used for heating was in high demand, so boys were forced to perform substantially more labor that was extremely physically demanding, dangerous, and time-consuming. The child labor took away from free time and sleep that all children needed. Despite the risks of injury and death, school administrators continued to rely on student labor as an essential part of the school's operation. ^[4]

Survivor, Elder Johnny John spoke about his experiences, and what Carcross was like for him as a small boy. He refers to Carcross as “like a big jail”, and that it’s the worst incarceration he’s had in his life. While at Carcross he was forbidden to see his sisters, who also attended the school, even during the day. At night he remembers hearing children crying all night from hunger, abuse, and extreme cold conditions; they were restricted to a single blanket to sleep with at night and if they were found with a second one, they were punished. The teachers and staff had no empathy for a child with a disability. John had poor eyesight and was ridiculed by the teachers, calling him the laziest kid ever.^[5] The children suffered a lot of spiritual harm; the children were denied any of their native spiritual practices. At Carcross anything associated with the children’s native culture was strictly forbidden, and they faced brutal punishments for attempting to connect with their culture.^[6] In the 1940s, the principal admitted to strapping students so severely that they had to be held down ^[1]. Students were expected to conform to Christian moral and

social norms and received severe and painful punishments if they did not abide to those rules.^[3]

Student Population

Students were brought in from all over Yukon and surrounding areas like British Columbia, Alaska, and Northwest Territories.^[4]

More than 1000 children are estimated to have attended the school during its operation, though records remain incomplete, and many students have not been identified. Only 730 are documented to this day. This hints at how the children were neglected and treated poorly. Since the record keeping was so bad, there are assumptions of missing children and unmarked graves.^[4]

The school faced challenges when it came to recruiting students, since many Indigenous families did not want to send their children away.^[4] Enrolment did eventually increase after compulsory education policies were introduced in 1920, which made attendance mandatory for Treaty-status children between ages 7-15^[1]. A significant number of students came from situations of family hardship, like being orphaned or poor.^[4]

Deaths and Unmarked Graves

There is a total of 27 known deaths that occurred at Carcross during its time open, although there is estimated to have been up to 42 deaths at this school. The undocumented deaths are due to poor record-keeping.^[2] A former teacher, Richard King, who taught from 1962-1963 said the records were worse than how animals are tracked on a farm.^[2] This means the number of deaths may be higher. Although, sometimes deaths couldn't be documented because they did not even know the child's name.^[7] Most of the deaths were due to illnesses and injury, and there was rarely a visit to the hospital for these children. Many of the unknown deaths are found from the dozens of unmarked graves found at Carcross but mostly far away from the school, and most of the children's bodies whereabouts are still unknown. ^[2]

Remembering the Children of Carcross^[1]

Name	Year of Death
Ada Roberts	1916-01-08
Albert Jackson	1942-09-14
Albert Tom	ca. 1929
Bella Daneil	ca. 1924-01-01 - 1925-12-31
Bertha Jimmy	1953-05-07
Caroline Moses	1946-09-05
Charlie Johnson	1931-01-16
Clara Moses	1950-06-27
Cora Drugan	ca. 1921
Donnie Miller	Not Known
Douglas Burns	1960-11-04
Douglas Hall	1946-04-28
Elizabeth Kwatlatyi	ca. 1924-01-01 - 1925-12-31
Eunice (Carcross)	1913
Eva Dau	1905-03-22
John Lucas	1958-04-16
Joshua Moses	1922-12-19 or 1923-12-01
Martha McLeod	1929-05-10
Mollie Dickson	1906
Paddy McGundy	1925-07-13
Paul Peter McGinty	1920-03-25
Rebecca Tizyah	1922-11
Sarah Moses	1945-12-05
Sarah Tetlechi	1924-05-01
Saul Moses	1918-07-25
Susie Anderson	1931-05-10
Tony Dau	1905-03-22

Legacy and Reconciliation

Residential schools, particularly the Carcross Residential School, has left a lasting impact on the Indigenous children and families that attended this school. Years of generational trauma and abuse have led to unstable indigenous communities and has left the Indigenous culture, broken and lost. The long-term effects of this school included cultural disruption and challenges for former students. Adjusting to life after leaving the institution, many struggled to feel comfortable within their communities and the

broader Euro-Canadian society, a world that was built without Indigenous peoples in mind. Historians have emphasized that the school's assimilationist goals often resulted in lasting social and psychological impacts on individuals and communities.^[3]

Between the years of 1986 and 1998, the United Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church of Canada each issued apologies or confessions regarding their contribution to colonization and the residential school system. In 1993, in Minaki, Ontario, the then Primate Archbishop Micheal Peers issued a landmark apology, expressing deep regret for the church's part in the system and the 'cultural, emotional and sexual abuse' suffered by students.^[8]

In 2019, 26 years after the landmark apology, Archbishop Fred Hiltz, offered an Apology for Spiritual Harm to Indigenous peoples during the national gathering of the General Synod (a national assembly of certain churches that happens every 3 years). This apology was lengthy and recognized the damage that was caused when Indigenous identity, language and spiritual practices were dismissed or suppressed.^[9]

Later, May 1st, 2022, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's Canadian visit to several Indigenous communities brought further reconciliation. Archbishop Justin offered an apology on behalf of the church of England and for the legacy of colonialism and the harm done to Indigenous peoples. He states, "I am horrified. I ask myself where does that come from, that evil? It has nothing, nothing, to do with Christ."^[9]

Each of these public apologies is a part of the action that needs to be taken for reconciliation to occur. There was \$15.7 million of direct compensation that funded healing initiatives and support for survivors, this was under the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.^[9]

Anne Spice is an author and a Tlingit member of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation in Whitehorse, Yukon. In her writing piece, she shares her family's struggles with generational trauma and specifically her grandfather's experiences at the Carcross Residential School. Anne describes the hardships her grandfather was forced to face every day, long after he left the residential school. She specifically highlights the testimony her mother made at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Spice's mother speaks for those who are silent, now who never got a chance to tell their story. She describes what she knows about her father's experience at Carcross Residential School, hoping to shed light on the trauma and lingering harm residential schools and colonialism continue to cause on Indigenous peoples.^[10]

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Cross Lake Roman Catholic Residential Boarding School

Cross Lake Residential School was a Canadian Indian residential school located on Nelson River in Manitoba. The school operated for 54 years between 1912 and 1969. Cross Lake was the main residential school for the province of Manitoba.^[1] Between 1930 and 1960, the government was fully funding two separate schools, the Norway House and Cross Lake.^[2] Cross Lake Residential School was also known by nine other names consisting of; Jack River Annex, Norway House Roman Catholic, St. Joseph's Indian Residential School, Norway House Boarding School, Cross Lake Residential School, Cross Lake Roman Catholic Residential School, Cross Lake Indian Industrial School, Cross Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School and St. Joseph's Indian Boarding School.^[3] "The school's objective was to 'civilize' Indigenous children, a process that involved strict English-only policies, Christianization efforts, and a curriculum that largely ignored or denigrated Indigenous cultures and knowledge."^[4]

History

Among 24 different communities, 1,240 Indigenous children were made to attend Cross Lake Residential School.^[5] Cross Lake Residential School was administrated on the land of the Pimicikamak Cree Nation.^[6] Throughout the years of operation, 85 students' deaths were documented.^[7] Cross Lake's community went into a state of identity crisis due to the amount of suicides as a result of intergenerational trauma.^[6]

1930 fire

On February 25, 1930 a fire broke out in the residential school. The school's water system failed during this time and exposed the unsafe conditions that were evident in so many residential schools.^[8] This incident caused 13 people to die in the fire; 11 girls, 1 boy and 1 staff member. The poorly designed housings only gave the girls one fire escape, compared to the boy's dormitory where there were two.^[9] This fire reinforced deeper-rooted problems within the residential school system, as it brought to light the "poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and blatant disregard for the well-being of Indigenous children."^[8] The school was not rebuilt until 1940. Students who attended the school and survived the fire spent the next 10 years at different hostels affiliated with local Catholic day schools.^[10]

After the fire in 1930, two boys named George Payne, 17, and Nelson Hughes, 18, were convicted of starting the fire at Cross Lake. Between the 10 years of the school not being rebuilt, many petitions were sent in hopes to have the school reconstructed. There were two petitions sent within the 10 years of the school not being rebuilt.^[11]

The children who passed away during the fire were placed together in a single coffin and were buried at the Cross Lake Roman Catholic Cemetery on March 4th, 1930.^[8]

Evidence produced in court proved that the fire that the two boys set at Cross Lake Residential School led to a mass homicide that took 13 lives in total.^[11]

The assistant fire commissioner reported a month later on March 8th, 1930 that the nuns' effort to save the children "were little short of miraculous"^[11]

Governmental and operational roles

Cross Lake was funded by the Canadian government. The school was run by many different Christian religious groups including the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate via the Roman Catholic Diocese being the prominent one.^[3] The administration was dealt with by the Roman Catholic Church.^[4]

In 1962, the management at Cross Lake was transferred to the Indian and Eskimo Welfare Commission and it stayed that way until the residential school closed in 1969.^[3]

Student experience

Education

Cross Lake Residential School offered mostly elementary grades for the majority of the time that the school was up and running. Towards the late 1930s and 1950s, grade 7 and 8 were offered, as well as kindergarten in the early 1960s. Within the final years of the residential school being open, all grades up to grade 6 were being taught and in the last year it was only grades 1 through 4.^[3]

The fire affected the amount of students who attended the residential school for a decade but in the late 1950s, the school obtained its highest student population with 149 students attending.^[3]

Two different residences

With Norway House and Cross Lake both being located in Manitoba, students were transferred between the residential schools. The two residential schools were funded by the Cross Lake Residential School per capita grant and this allowed the schools to have a large student population. Students who lived at the Norway House, which was also referred to as the "Jack River Branch" or the "Jack River Annex" were still enrolled at Cross Lake, yet would go to school there.^[3]

During the 10 years of limbo between the two different schools, the students at both locations were supported under the government funded grant. However, in March it only allowed under 10 students to permanently board there and it was not until September 1933 that the grant allowed for 30 students to stay in both Cross Lake and Norway House. The amount of students allowed at both operating schools remained 30 until August 1938.^[3]

Student health conditions

After Cross Lake Residential School was rebuilt in 1940 following a fire, students who returned to the new facility developed severe health issues, and deaths occurred shortly after.^[3]

Tuberculosis occurred in 1943 due to overcrowding at St. Joseph's Residential School as stated in the reports held at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.^[7]

Closure

The school permanently closed in 1969 and the responsibility for the school shifted to the provincial education system.^[11]

A second fire in 1969, led to the building being destroyed.^[2]

While the school had multiple names during its 57 years of operations, in the final year of its operation the school renamed itself Cross Lake Student Residence and that was the final name before the school closed on June 30, 1969.^[3]

Legacy and reconciliation

The Cross Lake band has aimed to create a lasting monument to commemorate the students who attended Cross Lake Residential School. This attempt began to foster reconciliation as even though Pope Francis did make an apology to the Nation, in regards to the survivors of the Residential Schools, he did not shed light on the students who did not make it back to their families.^[12]

In 2021, Cross Lake Community obtained 2.1 million dollars for research that was funded by the federal government. The money was given for "archival research, statement gathering, commemoration and fieldwork investigation" in aims to help communities with their research to hopefully begin to discover and document the children who never made it home.^[13]

The issues that they are having with the search that they are trying to conduct is that new homes have been built on the land where the school once stood.^[1]

The legacy of residential schools has had lasting impacts on families across Manitoba, with the loss of children and the enduring trauma that is still present.^[13]

What are Residential School Survivors doing now?

Residential school survivor Elder Betty Ross from the Pimicikamak Cree Nation explains how she is a survivor of two separate residential school experiences, as she attended Cross Lake along with another school. Betty Ross has shared her residential school experiences through two books. In 2008, she was working as a Cree interpreter, until she went to work as a Spiritual Cultural Care Provider for Indigenous Health Initiatives for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Betty then retired in 2018. Currently, she is working with different schools focusing on Indigenous Cultural Initiatives for all elementary levels.^[14]

Elder Betty Ross believes that Truth must come before Reconciliation. It is essential for the city of Winnipeg to accept and utilize the truth that lies Indigenous history in order to overcome long standing hurtles that have been put in place as a result of colonialism.^[14]

Discovery of unmarked graves

The chief of the Pimicikamak Cree Nation David Monais, insists that closure needs to be given to communities whose families lost lives. Leaders in Pimicikamak have called upon the federal government to assist them in searching for potential burial sites located at the residential school.^[15]

A community in Manitoba "found 150 anomalies at the site of a former residential school, including what are believed to be 59 unmarked graves at a nearby cemetery"^[7]

It has been said by the Chief of the Pimicikamak Cree Nation David Monais that "the community is aware of one mass grave for children who died in one of the fires in 1930"^[1]

While the community of Cross Lake is attempting to bring attention to the forgotten children, it has been difficult to identify how many students existed, as names were not accurately documented in existing records.^[1]

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Elkhorn Indian Residential School

Elkhorn Residential School was an Indigenous residential school located in Elkhorn, Manitoba, Canada. It was a part of the Canadian Indigenous Residential School System, a network of institutions created by the government and design to assimilate indigenous children into a western culture and society. Like many other residential schools, Elkhorn was founded under colonial policies that were seeking to suppress Indigenous language, identities and culture. The school was open during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century and contributed to the system that still continues to affect indigenous communities across Canada ^[1].

The history of Elkhorn Residential School

Elkhorn Residential School was created in the late 19th century in rural Manitoba. It was a part of the residential schools implemented by the Canadian government in collaboration with the christian organsiation ^[2]. Those institutions were aimed to assimilate Indigenous people into the settler culture by separating children from their families and their communities ^[3]. Elkhorn Residential School system reflected a broader strategy to control Indigenous education and to promote the cultural assimilation. Also, some schools, including those in Elkhorn face low enrollment which at times threatened their continu operation. In fact, the Washakada School in Elkhorn frequently struggled to maintain student numbers ^[4]. Indeed, to address this, officials sometimes admitted children from outside the local communities. Therefore, one administrator desrbibed the effort to fill the school,

"I worked hard and got every child out of the Qu'Appelle School, who had no right to be there... if it is decided by the Department, that we should admit half breeds living as Indians, off the Reserves; and if this is the class of persons you want to admit to our schools, I can fill the Elkhorn Shcool in three weeks" ^[5].

Overall, this statment shows the systemic discrimination is residential school administriation and we can see the focus on assimilating Indigenous children regardless of their background or community.

The operations and assimilation process

Elkhorn Residential School operated under the church's authority with an overlook from the Federal Department of Indigenous Affairs. Children were admitted from nearby Indigenous communities, often as young as four or five years old. The daily routine was structured around a strict routine that combine religious instruction, manual labor and strict discipline. All designed to enforce assimilation into western culture and society ^[6] & ^[7]). In fact, academic development at the school was often basic since it prioritized assimilation over education. Therefore, boys were typically assigned physically demanding tasks such as framing, maintenance and other physical labor, while girls was trained in domestic skills including cooking, cleaning and sewing ^[8].

Although those activites aimed to install skills that were considered necessary for life in settler society. They were used to limit opportunities for children to maintain their Indiegnous knowledge and practices. With that being said, discipline was strict and punishments were frequently use to enforce compliance. Indeed, surviror testimonies describe emotional and physical abuse, along with compulsory adherence to school rules. Teachers were often untrained in child development and rely on strict enforcement to maintain control over the students ^[9]. Religious institutions played an important role in the school operations. Like many residential schools, Elkhorn was influenced by christinaity and their way of teaching. Therefore, students was expected to not say: force to participate in religious activities as part of

the daily routine to help assimilate.

To conclude, the overall structure of Elkhorn Indian Residential School reflected the broader goal of the residential school system across Canada. Reshaping Indigenous children into members of the western society by controlling them, their environment, their education, their religious practices and we think even their daily experiences.

The conditions and experiences of our school

To start with, the students at Elkhorn Residential School experienced isolation from their families, suppression of their culture and systemic abuse. This is why that many children were removed from their homes for months or even years. Losing daily contact with parents, siblings and community members was all a part of their assimilation. Settlers believed that stripping them of their culture would make it easier. In fact, life at the school was highly regimented, early mornings, long workdays and very limited recreational opportunities ^[10]. Cultural suppression was a defining feature of the school experience. Children were forbidden to speak their Indigenous languages and punished for practicing traditional customs. This very much contributed to the loss of language, knowledge and community cohesion. It also caused intergenerational trauma ^[11].

Therefore, physical conditions were often poor which meant that students lived in overcrowded dormitories with insufficient sanitation and limited access to nutritious food. Those had a lot of consequences on their health, such as malnutrition, illness and inadequate medical care were common and had lasting health consequences ^[12]. Overall, religious classes were central to daily life. They were expected to memorize prayers, attend church services and adopt some Christian beliefs. This reinforced the suppression of Indigenous spiritual and cultural identity while promoting European Canadian Norms ^[13] & ^[14].

The closure and aftermath of the school

Elkhorn Residential School eventually closed their doors as part of a broader movement to reform Indigenous education and address the harms caused by residential schools ^[15]. Its closure marked a critical step in acknowledging the historical injustices and traumas perpetrated by the residential school system and the ongoing challenges faced by survivors and their communities. Following closure, initiatives were established to document and preserve the experiences of survivors. The Indian Residential School survivors storybase at the University of Toronto, for example, provide a platform for survivors to share their stories, ensuring their experiences are recorded for education, research and reconciliation purpose ^[16].

The legacy and its reconciliation

The legacy of Elkhorn Residential School continues to affect survivors, their families and communities. In fact, intergenerational trauma, cultural loss and social challenges persist, showing the lasting impacts of assimilationist policies. Also, reconciliation efforts have included educational programs, formal apologies from church and government institutions and a community based healing initiative ^[17] & ^[18]. Therefore, Elkhorn Residential School serves as a symbol of the broader residential schools system in Canada, showing the effect of colonialism and systemic discrimination. Indeed, the survivor testimony and public awareness campaigns continue to educate a wider community about the harms caused by residential schools and the importance of cultural revitalization ^[19] & ^[20]. Overall, the educational initiatives and archival research have been crucial in preserving those histories and informing the reconciliation efforts. To finish, by documenting the experiences of students and survivors and also with knowledge of Bishop's EDU 205 class, communities can understand the scale of harm caused by residential schools and work toward healing, cultural preservation and policy reform for future generations ^[21].

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Fille Hills Residential School

The **File Hills Indian Residential School** also known as the **File Hills Boarding School** or **File Hills School** was a Canadian residential school for First Nations Cree and Saulteaux. It was erected in March of 1889 until its closure in June of 1949. The File Hills Indian Residential School was operated under the Women's Missionary Society of Presbyterian United Church. It was initially run by the Presbyterian, later United Church. File Hills Indian Residential school was located outside of the boundaries of the Okanese reserve in Saskatchewan. The reserve was located adjacent with the File hills Agency, which was within the limits of Treaty Territory which was approximately 75 miles northeast of Regina and 13 miles north of Balcarres.^[1]

Background

History

The 1874 Treaty No. 4 (or Qu'Appelle Treaty) signed by the Cree, Saulteaux and Assiniboine peoples established that there should exist "a school in the reserve allotted to each band as soon as they settle on said reserve." This lead to the opening of a day school in 1884 by J.C. Richardson on the Little Black Bear Reserve, which operated for a short time. The day school reopened in September 1886 and operated until September 1889 when the school was expanded and turned into a residential school under the supervision of the Women's Missionary Society.^[2]

A bigger building was constructed in 1910 which increased the number of students attending the school.^[2]

In 1911 the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the federal government came to an agreement for management and operation of the school. Although the United Church took over the administration in 1925. No agreements between the United Church and the department of Indian affairs had been found.^[1]

According to testimonies and the Women’s Missionary Society’s annual reports, the school expanded its facilities in the 1920s. The school was surrounded by a yard which was fenced off. The school had class rooms, separate dormitories for boys and girls, a dining room, a farm, gardens, a dairy room, a laundry room, a bakeshop, a sewing room, and a kitchen. According to testimonies each student was giving a number. The girls were kept separate from the boys and they were not allowed to talk to them.^[3]

Student Population

The student population from the File Hills Indian Residential school came from multiple reserves and agencies. Intially, students were taken from neighbouring reserves, namely Peepeekisis, Okanese, Star Blanket, and Little Black Bear. Later, the school recruited children from more distant reserves, such as Pasqua, Muscowpetung and Piapot.^[2] Although parents from these reserves argued and resisted, the school was too far from their reserves and only three children from these reserves eventually attended File Hills Residential School.^[1]

Student enrolment (only 9
years available)^[1]

Year	Number of students
------	--------------------

1889	8
1892	12
1902	15
1908	25
1914	49
1928	90
1939	95 to 99
1943	98
1948	100

Life at File Hills

Schooling and work

The File Hills Residential School was developed by Indian Affairs official W. M. Graham in Saskatchewan based on an agricultural boarding school model. The school followed a half-day system, half of the day being dedicated to classes and the other half working, usually at the school's farm and gardens. There were no more than a hundred students enrolled in the school.^[4]

Students were taught reading, spelling and arithmetic. However according to many survivors, the students were overworked as they were being required to do hard manual work. As one survivor, Alvin Stonechild, points out "we were driven like slaves", saying that "one could term this kind of work as child labour."^[3] The students were never paid even though they were told by the school's administration that they would be. In their testimonies, many survivors recall doing more labour than learning in the classroom: "the only thing is I didn't get much schooling because I spent a lot of time working on the farm" (Bernard Pinay, a survivor from File Hills).^[5]

Boys usually worked in the farm and the gardens while girls usually worked either in the sewing room, the dairy, the bakeshop, or the kitchen. They would bake up to a hundred loaves of bread a day. Even though the students worked in the dairy they only got the skim milk while the staff got the cream.^[3] Students were often left unsupervised when they worked. For instance, Melvina McNabb, a survivor, was permanently injured in the laundry room after having her arm crushed by a machine which left her with a weakened arm for the rest of her life.^[5]

Clothes and material conditions

The clothes were very simple. The students wore underwear made out of flour sacks and simple loose grey clothes. They had fancier black and white clothes for Church on Sundays. The boots were often too tight which led many students to have health issues in later years, such as bunions. The students would frequently get frostbite because they were not dressed properly for the cold weather. The staff kept the students' hair short, no longer than to the middle of the ears for girls.

The meals were of very poor quality and not nutritious. Multiple testimonies point to the fact that the children were hungry all the time. Breakfast usually consisted of some kind of porridge. For lunch, they had stew with a slice of plain bread. For dinner, they would have the same kind of stew, mostly made up of vegetables. The students rarely got meat and fruits were occasional treats. Because the students were malnourished and overworked many of them had poor health and suffered life-long health issues. The

kids would save any kind of food they could, such as bread crusts. Students working in the kitchen and the bakery would sometimes steal food and share it with the others. But if they were caught they would be physically punished. The staff had better food, such as butter, eggs, and dessert after every meal.^[3]

Discipline and punishment

The students suffered regular and repeated beatings from the staff. Some survivors also suffered from sexual abuse while attending the school.^[3] The staff would regularly hit or slap the children, sometimes for no apparent reason. Children were required to speak English and they were forbidden from speaking their native tongue. Most students entered the school knowing only Cree and they were beaten for it. Once the kids were admitted they would have their heads shaved bald. For instance, one survivor, Charlie Bigknife, recounts how on his first day, the staff aggressively shaved all of his hair:

“The farm instructor whose name was Mr. Redgrave [...] came in with a sheep’s shear and cut my four braids off and threw them on the floor. After a while along came a young boy rolling a horse clippers into the room and that horse clippers bounced over my head and gave me a bald head. After he got through, he said, “Now you are no longer and Indian” and he gave me a slap on the head.”^[5]

The daily regiment was very strict, students were living in constant fear. Alvin Stonechild, a survivor, recalls how the boys were washed together in a bathtub in an aggressive way. He remembers how the water taps were turned on full blast without a warning, the aggressive scrubbing from the supervisor. The staff would use kerosene on the students’s hair to treat head lice. When children would get seriously ill the supervisors would wait until the last minute to take them to the hospital.^[3]

The principal would use the straps on the children’s arms, sometimes to the point where they could not bend their arms anymore. Melvina McNabb recalls the abuse: “they would strap us with a thick strap, a long strap, strap us on the hands till our wrists would bleed.” According to Charlie Bigknife, the principal had three kinds of straps hanging by his desk that he would use for punishment: “one was a wide webbed strap, then there was a rubberized one, the next size to that... the real one that used to hurt was a thick rubberized belting.”^[3]

Runaways would be very severely punished. They would be “put to bed, stripped naked, with a sheet over them and they got a good strapping” (according to Malvina McNabb). Some of them would be beaten so severely that they could not walk afterwards. The runaways would be strapped on their bodies and their hair would be shaved, girls included, as punishment. Other students were required to go look for runaways. Those students were required to tell the parents if their child had frozen to death. If the child had made it back home, they had to ask the parents to send their child back to the school. If the parents refused they would be sent to jail and supervisors would come to get the child.^[3]

Some of the common forms of punishments included: being sent to bed without a meal, having to stand in the hallway all night and being deprived of sleep, being strapped to their bed, being strapped on their bottoms, scrubbing the floors and the ceilings, having their hair shaved bald, beatings and strappings on the limbs.^{[3][5]}

Loss of Aboriginal culture and assimilation

Students were taught the bible and their traditional practices were completely forbidden. As Elsie Ross, a survivor, points out “we never, ever learned our cultural ways and how to pray to our Creator.” The burning of Sweetgrass was forbidden. Many children lost their ability to speak Cree and/or Saulteaux.

Usually, parents would speak Cree to each other but, because they knew their children would be punished for speaking the language, they would only talk to them in English. The school staff would severely punish students if they attempted to practice their Aboriginal ceremonies. One survivor recalls that students who would try to participate in traditional practices “always got hell.”^[3]

Tuberculosis and vaccine experiments

In the 1930s, File Hills benefited from tuberculin testing provided by the Qu'Appelle Indian Demonstration Health Unit (also known as the Fort Qu'Appelle Health Unit). The health unit was supported by the Saskatchewan Anti-Tuberculosis League (SATL) and funded by the National Research Council and Indian Affairs. Before the test was given to the students, 92% of the students at the school had been tested positive for tuberculosis. After the test, the percentage of students tested positive dropped to 60%.

As in most residential schools across Canada, the high levels of tuberculosis contamination was due to overcrowding and poor living conditions (such as inappropriate clothes for colder weather and malnourishment).

In 1933, vaccination with the BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) vaccine was conducted on infants born at the Qu'Appelle Indian Demonstration Health Unit as well as students from both the File Hills and Qu'Appelle schools. The vaccination campaign was conducted by Dr. George Ferguson, even though he was skeptical of human testing. He proceeded to conduct the experiment regardless. While there were no deaths among the students at the school, about 1/6 of the vaccinated infants died.^[5]

Incidents

Drowning incident

On November 4, 1912 a report was made of 3 young boys who went playing on a lake near the school. While playing one of the boys Archie Feather went through the ice and drowned. Parents of the children would accuse the School of carelessness and negligence towards the children resulting in the event.^[6]

Suicide attempt

There is recorded evidence of a boy who was of deaf hearing named Kenneth Stonechild. who had difficulty with learning in the classroom. After the teacher grew fed up and lost his patience with the child the teacher began to shout and boxed his ears. as well as teasing from the older. the student would attempt suicide in 1939, although a doctor would dispute that it was a suicide attempt.^[7]

Deaths and unmarked graves

Regarding the File Hills residential school there has been 14 recorded deaths of the children who have attended, with possibly more unmarked or unknown recorded deaths taking place from testimonial accounts. Causes for deaths range from mistreatments like malnourishment to drastic beatings without any treatment for injuries.^{[8][9]}

Unmarked graves were found in 2014 across the lake from the school site.^[4]

Fires

The school's poultry house was destroyed in a fire in 1935.^[5]

The school was destroyed by a fire in 1942 which destroyed two classrooms. The fire was suspected to have been deliverately set.^[9]

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Hay River Residential School

Hay River Residential School was a Canadian residential school for Indigenous children, including Dene and Métis, that operated in Hay River, Northwest Territories, from 1895 to 1937. It was administered by the Anglican Church and funded by the Government of Canada.^[1] Today the former site is no longer in operation as a school and remains part of the local community landscape.



Schoolchildren, Mission at Hay River, Northwest Territories, 1925

History

Early History

Prior to the establishment of the Hay River Residential School, smaller mission schools existed in the Hay River region.^[2] In the late nineteenth century, Anglican missionaries established missions in the Northwest Territories as part of broader efforts to introduce Euro-Canadian education and Christianity to Indigenous communities.^[3] These missions formed the basis for early schooling in the area. By 1895, a boarding school was established at the Anglican mission in Hay River, marking the transition from smaller mission-based instruction to a formal residential school. The school received funding from the federal government and operated under the Anglican Church.^[2] The Hay River School served children from surrounding Indigenous communities, including Dene and Métis populations, who attended the institution as boarding students.^[4]

Expansion and Closing

By the twentieth century, the Hay River Residential School continued to operate under the administration of the Anglican Church with financial support from the federal government. In 1917, a new building was constructed to accommodate a larger number of students and continue its operations within a more formalized structure.^[1] During this period, the school functioned as part of the Canadian residential school system, which emphasized religious instruction, basic education, assimilation, and practical training.^[2] The school continued to operate throughout the 1920s and early 1930s with some administrative changes. In 1935 discussions were underway to amalgamate the Hay River Residential School with other institutions in the region specifically Shingle Point. In 1937 the school closed and later became associated with the commemoration and historical recognition efforts^[1]

Present Day

Today, the Residential school is no longer in operation and the former site is a part of the community's landscape. The location has been recognized for its historical significance as part of the Canadian residential school system.^[1] Efforts to acknowledge the school's history have been led by local indigenous communities including the K'atłodeeche First Nation.^[2] In 2018 a plaque was unveiled to honor the victims of the residential school. The site has also been designated a National Historic Site of Canada. Archival records, including those held by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, continue to preserve documentation related to the school and contribute to ongoing research and public education.^[1]



Anglican Church in Hay River

Publications

Hay River Paints Crosswalk in Solidarity With Indigenous Community This article, published by the Cabin Radio, established in Yellowknife, highlights the recognition of the impact of the residential school in Hay River on its community day ahead of the National Indigenous Peoples Day. Dayna King, a Hay River resident with graphic design experience, realized this project of painting feathers on the crosswalk at the intersection of Woodland Drive and Courtoreille Street. This project was in the interest of the city to recognize the strong Indigenous representation in the community and remember the residential school survivors and victims and their families. ^[5]

GNWT releases report on history of NWT education facilities including residential schools, day schools and residences In 2022, the Government of Northwest Territories published a report engaging with the former Premier, Caroline Cochrane, and the former Minister of Education, now Premier, R.J. Simpson. Both explained the impact of the residential schools on communities, knowing that the history of the Indigenous people is greater in the Northwest Territories than anywhere in the country. Discussing with Indigenous people as part of the Council of Leaders is, for former Premier Cochrane, needed to commit to reconciliation every step of the way. ^[6]

Commemoration and memorials

Plaque and community memorialization

In 2018, the Katłodeeche First Nation unveiled a commemorative plaque to honor the former students and survivors of Hay River Residential School, part of the broader Canadian Indian residential school system. Its purpose is to highlight the profound impact of the experience of former students at this school. This initiative demonstrates a community effort to acknowledge the history of the institution, contribute to the processes of reconciliation and remembrance, and bring to light the realities endured by former students.^[7]

Burial and Deaths

The Hay River Residential School archives show that several student deaths occurred while the school was operating. There are even several records of deaths without any real explanation as to the causes or burial sites.^[8]

The limited information available to us reflects the enormous general difficulties associated with identifying and commemorating burial sites linked to residential schools. This remains a significant aspect of reconciliation efforts.^[8]

Remembering the Following Children^[9]

Name	Date of Death (Year-Month-Day)
Adele Tambour	1930-02-20
Alice Bompass	ca. 1933
Alice McPherson	1912-02-14
Annie Sindinilyn	1927-10-20
Archie Lamilise	1930-05-14
Bella Snowshoe	1924-12-29
Bella Vittrekwa	ca. 1936
Benjamin Martin	1929-07-03
Catherine Vittrekwa	1935-04-08
Ellen Kaatodh	1926-04-21
Elsie Camsell	1930-05-18
Emma Huskey	1919-01-06
Ethel Edwards	1926-02-08
Ethel McPherson	1930-06-08
Florence McDonald	1925-04-25
Georgie Horasi	1903-09-30
Hannah Sittichinli	1925-01-13
Harriet (Hay River)	1903-10-01
Harriet Etenasia Sanfrere	1928-01-02
Henry Andrew	1930-04
Jack Tairona	1928-11-28
James Koe	Not known
John Pascal	1929-01-28
John Thomas Smith	ca. 1937
Johnny Dry-Meat	1925-04-13
Jonathan Martel	1930-05-21
Joseph Andrew	1930-06-05
Joseph Vittrekwa	1930-04-01
Laura Lagituk	1929-07-01
Louisa Pascal (All Saints)	1929-03-24
Lucy Andrews	1928-03-09
Mabel Camsell	1925-06-20
Mabel Joyce McLeod	1929-06-16
Mabel Njootli	ca. 1930-04
Mary Netathli	1903-09-03
Moses Andrew	1930-01-09
Moses Uilok	1927-12-27

Nellie Horrisey	1930
Olive Helene Firth	1933-11-14
Perry George Siberian	1924-04-21
Rosie Martel	1930-01-31
Walter Choutsi	1903-09-26

Archival and historical recognition

The Hay River Residential School is documented in the archives of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. This database preserves documents, reports, and historical artifacts. The website itself contributes to the commemoration by ensuring the preservation of the school's history and that the students' experiences are acknowledged and accessible to all. The website and database provide public education on the subject and facilitate research into the events that took place.^[10]

Historic National Recognition

The site associated with the Hay River Residential School has been designated a National Historic Site of Canada. This designation demonstrates the site's significant historical importance due to its buildings, landscape, and adjacent cemetery. Furthermore, the site is preserved as an integral part of Canada's national heritage. This contributes to the commemoration of the residential school and its legacy within a broader framework of reconciliation and the process of remembrance for Canadians. While these cemeteries form part of the commemorative landscape of the site, limited documentation exists regarding burial locations connected to residential school students. As a result, the site contributes to broader processes of remembrance and reconciliation, while reflecting ongoing challenges in documenting the history of the institution.^[11]

Survivor voices and testimonies

Oral histories and experiences

Survivor testimonies and archival documents offer a valuable opportunity to understand the experiences of students at Hay River Residential School. All documents held by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation rigorously demonstrate that Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their communities and placed in institutions designed to stifle their culture and sever their community ties. This was achieved through the violence and assimilation policies of the authorities.^[10] ^[9] Oral histories and survivor testimonies from across Canada describe experiences of cultural repression, primarily concerning language, Indigenous cultural practices, the breakdown of families and communities, and ultimately, emotional trauma.^[12] The repercussions had lasting effects on the maintenance of identity, language, and intergenerational relationships. These repercussions continue to have negative impacts today.

The testimonies obtained by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reveal a more detailed reality. This reality, experienced by students in residential schools, particularly regarding discipline and the suppression of Indigenous identity, is highlighted by several former students. Many reported being punished for speaking their language and experiencing fear or loneliness within the institutions. These accounts confirm a general trend that underscores the emotional and personal dimension of this condemnation.^[13]

While specific testimonies from the Hay River Residential School are limited publicly available records, these broader accounts reflect experiences that were common across Canada including Hay River.^[9]

Impact on Former Students

Research conducted in Hay River Indigenous communities demonstrates how imposed systems, such as the school system, were entirely incompatible with local practices, values, and cultures. This unequivocally reinforced the barriers between the lifestyles of non-Indigenous people and the Indigenous communities themselves. These systems often favored Euro-Canadian knowledge and structures, limiting the integration of other perspectives, such as Indigenous cultural practices, into our education.^[14]

Furthermore, studies research conducted in the Hay River and K'atlodeeche First Nation context emphasize the importance of culturally appropriate approaches and Indigenous leadership in addressing these impacts. These approaches aim to strengthen the link between education, culture and community, and support efforts toward cultural continuity and well-being.^[15]

Efforts to document the names and experiences of former students continue, with the collaboration of communities, churches, and institutions that maintain archives. All contribute to a greater recognition of the survivors' experiences and the consequences they suffered.^[16]

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Payne Bay

This article examines the Federal Hostels at Payne Bay in Nunavik, Quebec, within the broader context of Indigenous education policies in Northern Canada. Although presented as a community-based alternative to residential schools, these hostels were rooted in the same assimilationist objectives of separating children from their families and suppressing Indigenous cultures (Government of Canada, 2013; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The goal of this article is to raise awareness, provide a deeper understanding of this unfamiliar institution, and contribute to a more complete acknowledgement of its impacts on Indigenous communities.

The Federal Hostels at Payne Bay were in Kangirsuk, Nunavik, Quebec, and operated for a brief period from October 3, 1960, to June 30, 1962. The hostels were small-scale facilities that were used by children whose parents were away on trap lines (Government of Canada, 2013).

Admissions

The hostels primarily served Indigenous children, reflecting the local population, but admissions were not restricted to Inuit; First Nations and Métis children could also attend. The hostels offered care while parents were away, and students typically returned home for approximately two weeks during Christmas vacation (Government of Canada, 2013).

Administration and Staffing

Unlike larger residential schools, the Federal Hostels did not have principals or formal administrators. Instead, teachers and hostel supervisors managed day-to-day operations. Each hostel was small: one housed nine children and the other eight. The hostels were entirely funded and run by the federal government. To this day, no records indicate convictions of physical or sexual abuse at Payne Bay or among staff present there (Government of Canada, 2013). However, it is important to note that many instances of abuse within the residential school system were not reported, making it difficult to determine the full extent of what occurred.

Living Conditions

Children in the northern residential school system, including Payne Bay, experienced challenging and often unsafe living conditions. The hostels were underfunded and poorly staffed, and students were subject to harsh discipline. They lived in unhealthy conditions and were exposed to disease and abuse (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 4). In the tragic event of a child's death, government policy dictated that children be buried nearby at the least possible cost, unless it was cheaper to return them to their home community or if the family could arrange and pay for the return. Families were often not notified of the death or the burial location, leaving many families still searching for information about their children (Canadian Geographic, 2026).

The history behind the policies that made it possible for Payne Bay

Bay hostel to be created Residential Schools in the North differ from the rest of Canada

Residential schools in the North are very different from residential schools in the rest of Canada. Mainly by the policies that made it possible for residential schooling in the North to be present. In the Northern part of the country, the federal government did not see any chance of economic development or settlement.

Therefore, the government was uninterested in creating residential schools and reserves. Moreover, the government also delayed adopting the obligations set out by the Treaties (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The Missionary Era

Before the 1950s, the Canadian government was uninterested in the North until after the Second World War. This era was called the “missionary era”. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 5) If it were not for Catholic and Anglican missionaries, residential schooling would have no history in the North before 1950 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 3). The arrival of two Catholic priests marked the beginning of the period of intense Catholic missionary work in the Canadian North. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 13). These early missions became the basis for residential schooling in the North. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 14). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, many patterns became apparent: a strong Catholic presence in the Mackenzie River basin, Anglican domination in the Yukon, the importance of residential schooling in the competition between Roman Catholics and Protestant Anglicans, and, following the signing of Treaty 8, federal funding began in the Canadian North (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 15).

The Bureaucratic Era

The era of residential schooling in the North after 1950 was marked by bureaucrats replacing missionaries. Prior to 1950, formal education for Indigenous Peoples was almost non-existent except for the mission schools formed by missionaries. After the major oil and mineral discovery in the Northwest Territories in the late 1950s and the increased military presence in the North following the Second World War and the Cold War (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 77), the Canadian government sought to assert its political authority. A significant element of this assertion was the establishment of a series of student hostels and day schools. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 73)

The Era after 1950

These hostels and day schools were under the control of Northern Affairs instead of Indian Affairs. From the beginning, the system was intended to be integrated into the public school system of the day and not be separate from it. At the end of the 1960s, these schools were transferred from the federal government to the governments of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. In the late 1950s, construction proceeded for the Payne Bay hostel among many others. By 1965, the government was planning further expansion of the hostels. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 82) It is because of this recent history that residential schools were formed in the Canadian North.

Federal Hostel at Payne Bay and the

Northern Experience Purpose of the Payne

Bay Hostels

The Federal Hostels at Payne Bay was one such institution as part of a broader program launched by the Northern Affairs Branch known as the SHP. They tried to keep the structure as an attempt to replicate the traditional home life of Inuit children (Government of Canada, 2013). The goal of these hostels was to give Inuit children access to higher education without having to send them far away to larger residential schools. This was seen to be offered as a community-based solution: however, these children were still taken from their homes, had no contact with their families, and were victims of cultural genocide. Aboriginal languages were suppressed rather than supported, which increased the amount of child neglect mainly seen as industrialized (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The mission of the Federal Hostels system was to assimilate Inuit and other First Nation children, while looking more flexible than residential schools (Government of Canada, 2013). However, this was no less abrupt; it was the same approach as residential schools found in a smaller setting. The impact was still very harmful; it broke down families, created much trauma in communities, weakened cultural identity, killed thousands of Indigenous peoples, caused sickness due to bad life conditions, and negligence.

Ideology behind Payne Bay Hostels

Similarly to larger residential schools, the mentality behind the hostels was to change first nations ways of life. The Government had a goal to change their culture and oblige them to adopt the western way. Their mentality was completely based upon assimilation, where their culture and lifestyle were not valued at all anymore. Even though they were a smaller “community”, the idea was the same: to take indigenous identity away and adopt European ways (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

What students were taught

Children who attended The Payne Bay Hostel were taught academic subjects mainly, English and Western culture. Indigenous children were forced to speak and write in the English language, abandoning their Nation’s language (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Western habits were forced upon them, which centered around discipline and structure. Indigenous children were violently punished for speaking their language, having long hair, practicing their culture, and trying to keep their identity. The Government deeply believed that Indigenous children should be taught these subjects to allow them to assimilate into Canadian society. The government’s ultimate mission was to force children to assimilate into society by abandoning their traditions, knowledge, and language. (Government of Canada, 2013)

Conclusion

The Federal Hostel at Payne Bay represents a significant chapter in the history of Canada’s residential school system. Through larger residential schools from the south, the hostels nonetheless participated in the same colonial mindset of removing Indigenous children from their communities and families. While the scale and structure of the hostels differed from larger residential schools, the impacts remained deeply harmful, including cultural suppression, family separation, and long-term trauma (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The limited records available on Payne Bay also highlight the broader issue of missing or incomplete documentation within the residential school system, making it difficult to fully understand the experiences of those who attended. Ultimately, examining places like Payne Bay is essential to recognizing that assimilation policies extended beyond well-known institutions and were embedded in multiple forms across Canada. Acknowledging the full scope of harm caused by colonialism is crucial in efforts toward truth and reconciliation.

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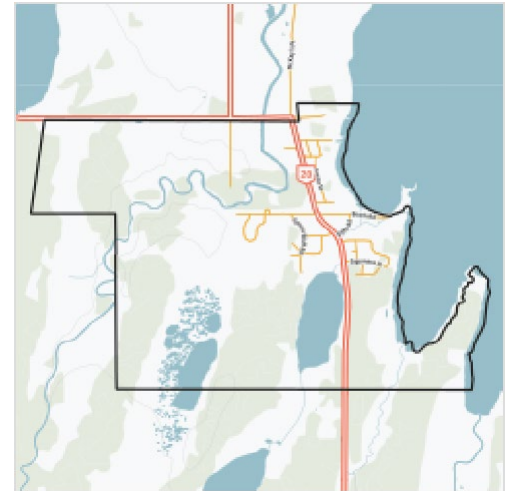
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Pine Creek Residential School

The **Pine Creek Residential School** (also known as Camperville Indian Residential School) operated from 1890 to 1969 and was situated in Camperville, Manitoba, Canada.^[1] The community lies along Lake Winnipegosis and is largely inhabited by Métis residents.^{[2][3]} It was part of the Canadian residential school system, which was funded by the federal government and primarily operated by Christian churches and religious organizations.^[4] The school was operated by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate alongside various groups of Catholic nuns.^[3]

The school was attended by Indigenous children from surrounding communities, including Anishinaabe and Métis students.^[3] As with other residential schools in Canada, the system aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into Western society by suppressing their traditional ways of life.^[4]

The residential school system has been associated with lasting impacts, including the loss of Indigenous languages, cultural practices, and knowledge.^[4]



Location of Camperville, Manitoba

History

Prior to the establishment of Pine Creek Residential School, Oblate missionaries were already active in the Camperville region for several years before 1886, when they created a permanent presence in the Pine Creek area and founded a local parish. The school was established in Camperville circa 1890. It was intended to bring together Indigenous children from surrounding communities as part of broader government efforts to centralize populations and promote assimilation within the residential school system.^[3]

A small boarding school opened in 1897 and initially accommodated roughly ten students. However, the building soon became inadequate and was in poor condition. Father Adelard Chaumont of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) and Bishop Langevin later persuaded the Canadian government to support the construction of a larger residential school in the community. A four-storey stone school building was completed in 1899 and soon became the central focus of the mission. The building was constructed using local stone by Scottish stone workers from the Red River region and was considered one of the first



Exterior view of Beauval Residential School building, 1924

substantial buildings northwest of Dauphin. In its early years, the structure also functioned as a place of worship, which contained a chapel. This remained the case until a larger stone church of similar design was constructed in the area between 1906 and 1910.^{[3][5]}

The school enrolled many Métis and Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Saulteaux) students. The federal government funded the institution and provided financial support based on student attendance. Enrollment increased over time, rising to about forty students before reaching approximately seventy by 1901. In 1925, the Roman Catholic mission sold the building to the Department of Indian Affairs after it was no longer able to finance the school.^[3] In later years, the institution was replaced by a new facility where students attended as day students rather than residing at the school.^[5] During the 1960s, the Canadian government began closing residential schools to transition Indigenous children into the broader public education system. This led to the school's closure in 1969 and its demolition in 1972.^[3] Following its demolition, materials from the building were repurposed to create a causeway in Pine Creek, while portions of the original foundation remain at the site.^[5]

Operation

The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were the first group of nuns to work alongside the Oblates in their mission. Later in 1922, the Benedictine Sisters replaced the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. In 1928, the Missionary Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate succeeded the Benedictine Sisters and remained in Camperville until the school's closure. The nuns were responsible for the care of the girls and carried out various duties within the school, including teaching, kitchen work, gardening, and managing the dairy.^[3] Students in higher grade levels received academic instruction for part of the day, while the remainder of their time was devoted to home economics and agricultural work. Academic instruction was primarily provided to older students, while younger children were more frequently assigned to labour, resulting in unequal access to formal education. Vegetable gardens and grain crops were developed to support the school's cattle herd.^[5] Students were involved in food production and contributed to the maintenance and operation of the school.^[5] Boys and girls were taught different hands-on skills and trades. Boys were trained in activities such as agriculture, carpentry, shoe repair, and painting, while girls were taught domestic tasks including cooking, budgeting, weaving, carding, and caring for livestock. Gardening was one activity shared by both groups.^[3]

The daily life of Indigenous children at Pine Creek Residential School was highly structured and organized around a division between labour and formal education, which shaped their routine. Students followed a daily routine that began early in the morning. At approximately 6:00, they woke up, followed by mass in the chapel at 6:30. The period before breakfast was typically reserved for chores, such as preparing tables or cleaning the dormitory and the priests' rooms. Following morning chores, students ate breakfast at 7:30, then spent time outdoors and began classes at 9:00. Practical skills and vocational training were typically taught in the morning, while afternoon instruction followed the midday break and began with catechism. Academic courses were generally provided to older students, whereas younger children were assigned to labour. Classes concluded at 4:00, followed by an extended recess, after which students resumed manual



Students in a residential school classroom, Quebec, 1939



labour. In the evening, students had another period of free time, followed by a scheduled study session before going to bed.^[3] As a result, academic instruction was limited in comparison to labour, which occupied a significant portion of the daily schedule.

Impact and legacy

The residential school system, which was imposed on Indigenous peoples as part of broader colonial policies, sought to assimilate them by suppressing their cultural identities and histories. Approximately 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children attended residential schools in Canada during the late 19th and 20th centuries.^[6] The impact of these experiences extended beyond survivors themselves, affecting their families and communities over time. It aimed to integrate Indigenous children into Christianity by separating them from their cultural practices and encouraging their conversion to Christianity. These practices reflected underlying beliefs rooted in racial, cultural, and spiritual superiority.^[6] While the residential school system was in operation, Indigenous children were forcibly separated from their families and subjected to mistreatment.^[6] They were removed from their cultural communities and restricted from using their mother tongues and practicing their traditional knowledge.^[6] Many experienced neglect, including malnutrition and starvation, as well as inadequate healthcare.^[6] In addition to neglect, they were often exposed to harsh discipline that resulted in emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.^[6] The consequences of the residential school system extended beyond abuse, as many children never returned home to their families. Thousands died while attending these institutions, and the burial sites of numerous children remain unknown.^[6]

The residential school system has been associated with lasting intergenerational effects within Indigenous populations, including reduced educational and social outcomes, increased levels of violence, and strained relationships between parents and children.^[4] These institutions eroded fundamental elements of Indigenous cultures by isolating children from their traditional ways of life, languages, and family systems, weakening their connections to the land. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada described the residential school system as a form of cultural genocide.^[4]

Indigenous peoples resisted the residential school system in various ways throughout its history.^[6] This included protesting mistreatment and inadequate schooling, as well as preserving their identities through the continued use of their languages.^[6] Survivors have played a key role in raising public awareness of the impacts of these institutions and advocating for recognition and justice.^[6] Such efforts led to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, formal government apologies, and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–2015).^[6] This contributed to widespread recognition of the historical injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples, including the imposition of Euro-Canadian culture by the federal government. In 2019, the residential school system was officially recognized as a National Historic Event in Canada, reflecting increased acknowledgment of its significance and long-term consequences for Indigenous communities.^[6] Parks Canada has worked with survivors and Indigenous communities to commemorate the residential school system through the installation of plaques at former residential school sites across Canada, marking its historical significance.^[6]

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's National Student Memorial Register records at least 21 children who died while attending Pine Creek Residential School.^[7] Investigations have also been conducted at the site in recent years. Following reports from survivors describing abuse and disturbing

experiences in the basement of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church, ground-penetrating radar identified fourteen anomalies.^[8] A subsequent excavation conducted by an archaeological team from Brandon University found no evidence of human remains.^[8]

Chief Derek Nepinak of Minegoziibe Anishinabe stated that the excavation results did not change the reality of the experiences faced by Indigenous families who attended Pine Creek Residential School. He also noted that the findings should not be considered conclusive for other investigations and emphasized the need for continued efforts to uncover the truth.^[8]

A commemorative monument was erected in 2019 near Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Roman Catholic Church to honour former students of the Pine Creek Residential School.^[5]

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External links

- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation – Pine Creek (Camperville) Residential School (<https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/manitoba/pine-creek-camperville/>)

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Pointe Bleu (QC) Residential School

Pointe Bleu was a residential school (<https://nctr.ca/education/residential-school-history/>) located in Quebec, Canada which operated from 1960 to 1991. The goal of this residential school as well as all the other schools were to assimilate the Indigenous community to becoming part of the evolving and modernizing culture by taking their language, culture and religion. Residential schools took indigenous children from all background whether its Metis, Inuit or First Nation, to teach them a different style of living. At these schools, these children often suffered extreme abuse which led to many of them never returning home to their villages. Residential



An image of Pointe Bleu in 1876

Schools were opened as of 1831 and continued for over 150 years which were all funded by the government and ran by majorly the Catholic Church. These churches implemented their belief system onto the kids in order to change their spiritual faith which is very sacred for indigenous people.^[1]

Area where Pointe Bleu was Located

Pointe Bleu is located in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Quebec and was opened for 31 years from 1960 to 1991. It's currently in the Innu community of Mashteuiatsh, which is near Roberval, Quebec and close to Lac Saint-Jean. Due to its location, Pointe Bleu was seen as a place of gathering, because it was easy to get to by land or water. The residential school was relatively small compared to the others across Canada with only around 200 children attending per year. In the Pointe Bleu area there were just over 1000 people to put into the perspective the 200 attending kids which number increased through the years. It was built to be a residential school and later transformed into a high school. The high school is named Kassinu Mamu which means all together in Innu. The Innu people of the Pointe Bleu area are now called the Pekuakamiulnuatsh community. Rather than trying to forget the past, this high school pushes towards learning its history and celebrating the knowledge of their ancestors.^[2]

Religious Beliefs in this Region

Like many residential schools, the religious beliefs in the surrounding region the Pointe-Bleue residential school were roman catholic. One of the three major branches of Christianity which is led by the pope and the Holy See forms the church's central government. The Pointe-Bleue residential school received Innu, Anishinaabe, Atikamekw as well as Cree children. In contrast to what these children knew before they were taken is very different to what they were then taught. For Cree's there is an interconnectivity between nature and people, religion is based off relations with animals and other spirits that reveal themselves in dreams. Living a life in balance with nature means achieving health and contentment.^[3] For Innu, there is no divine rulers or punitive deities; however, there is a highlight on taboos and rituals overseen by angakkuq who are seen as mediators between the human and spiritual realms.^[4] As the Anishinaabe believe in the manidoog which are sources of life and existence, therefore, all things have spirits such as plants, animals, people and the earth itself.^[5] The Atikamekw maintains and honour the environment as their beliefs are focused on a spiritual and deep connection to the land. The Atikamekw acknowledges six seasons in the year with each having a main activity.^[6] All the nations from which the children of Pointe-Bleue residential school have very different and complex belief systems from one another. Many and most indigenous groups around the world share deep, ancestral connections to the land and all its elements. This can be a major adjustment having to change to a belief forcibly.^[7]

More Information about Pointe Bleu Residential School

Pointe Bleu was a residential school located in Pointe Bleu, Quebec. Pointe Bleu was open from 1960-1991. In Pointe Bleu residential school, they mostly practiced assimilation, which means that their goal was to take over Indigenous culture and change their language and values. Out of the entire province of Quebec, which held around 10 residential schools, Pointe Bleu was the last residential school to open in Quebec, in 1960 and the last to close permanently,^[8] in 1991, only 35 years ago. In the years 1960-1961, there were 192 children at Pointe Bleu residential school and 99 of them were girls. Like other residential schools, Pointe Bleu had a lasting impact on its survivors, who have discussed psychological, physical

and cultural harm that still affects them now. Indigenous groups continue to face difficulties as a result of these events, which has led to an impact on future generations. Pointe Bleu is now acknowledged as a component of Canadas residential school system, which aimed to assimilate Indigenous peoples. Efforts such as truth and reconciliation is very important to accept what happened, support survivors and work towards justice. Like other residential schools, Pointe Bleu had a lasting impact on its survivors, who have discussed psychological, physical and cultural harm that still affects them now. Indigenous groups continue to face difficulties as a result of these events, which has led to an impact on future generations.

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Story from a Survivor

Claude Boivin, a survivor of the Pointe Bleu residential school in Roberval, Quebec^[9] was enrolled at Pointe Bleu when he was just 6 years old. He stayed there for 6 years, until he was about 12 years old. He remembers feeling afraid, especially when he would see the priest, dressed in all black, with big crosses hanging on their sides. By the time he was out of Pointe Bleu, at the age of 12, he was dysfunctional. He had a very hard time after. He was tossed around foster homes from the ages of 12-18 and even ended up in prison at 18. After all this, he decided to leave that area of Quebec and he moved to a bigger city, Montreal. After living in Montreal, he ended up in Vancouver and then the United States, with other Indigenous people from there. After Claude was released from prison, he was homeless for the following 17 years. He was 35 years old when he attempted suicide for the 3rd time because of all that he had been through. After this, he realized he needed to get reacquainted with his Innue roots. Now, Claude Boivin owns a flourishing business, and he reflects on his past experiences and all that he has survived to help others in his community of Mashteuiatsh. He says he will never forget it, but he choses to forgive it.^[10]

Story from Another Survivor



Another survivor story from Pointe Bleu is of François Gill, who attended the residential school from the age of 8. He is now currently a teacher at the Kassinu Manu high school which used to be his old residential school. The special aspect about these residential schools is that this is one of the few still standing in Quebec after the closure of all residential schools. Although François Gill is a survivor of the residential school, he now sees the transformation into the high school as a good thing for the community. He explains how Kassinu Manu is different than others, as this institution in addition to having all required courses has territorial outings. There are

outings twice a year, in which the students, teachers and cultural transmitters go into the forest for a week. During this week, they learn all about traditional lifestyle, hunting methods and toolmaking. These outings are more than just a way for students to get out of class and have fun as it allows them to learn about their cultural roots and get in touch with their spirituality. Over the years of the residential school, generations had lost touch with their own culture, religion and way of living and these outings allow the students to reconnect with older generations through nature with the help of teachers and cultural transmitters. These cultural transmitters are key in an indigenous society as most information is passed generation to generation by the elders in society telling stories. The survivor story of François Gill explains how he was able to make a negative in his life being the residential school and transform it into a

positive one by creating a safe and educational environment for kids that have access to learn about their heritage. ^[11]

Why it closed

Pointe Bleu residential school closed because of a nationwide shift in the 1970s, towards phasing out the residential school system supported by a shift towards Indigenous control over education. Since Pointe Bleu was the last residential school open in Quebec, they spent their last 10 years functioning under the control of their local community. This school also had a long history of abuse, physical and emotional, cultural suppression and forcing children to be separated from their families. Following the closure of Pointe Bleu residential school, the building ended up being reclaimed by the community, it was changed to a local, community run high school called Kassinu Mamu. ^[12]

Conclusion

The Pointe Bleu residential school was established to assimilate indigenous children by separating them from language, culture and families. Many indigenous children at the time, like Claude Boivin, suffered abuse for refusing to learn a forced belief. Pointe-bleu being the last to close only 35 years ago serves as a harsh reminder of Canada's residential school systems lasting effects. Acknowledging what happened at Pointe-Bleu can be crucial to understand the intergenerational trauma that still effects indigenous communities. Pointe Bleu left an effect on hundreds and thousands of children and their families. But, it was not left as that, the community surrounding Pointe Bleu overcame the obstacle, they didn't want to look back and only see the negative, they decided to try and make the best out of a bad situation. After the residential school was officially closed down, the community turned it into a High School, which changed the way a lot of people saw it. That being said, Pointe Bleu being the very last residential school in Quebec to close down left a mark on many people and their stories, their experiences and their lives will never be forgotten and always be taught to generation after generation.

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St. Anthony's Indian Residential School

St. Anthony's Indian Residential School was a residential school located on Seekaskootch Onion Lake Reserve of the Cree Nation, under Treaty 6, in Saskatchewan, Canada. It operated from 1894 until its closure in 1974. It was managed by the Roman Catholic Church by the Sisters of the Assumption, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Oblate Indian and Eskimo Council.^{[1][2]}

The school underwent several name changes and a location change during the course of its operation. From 1895 to 1924, it was named Onion Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School. From 1931 to 1968, it was named St. Anthony's (Onion Lake) Indian Residential School. At the end of its operation, from 1969 to 1974, it was named St. Anthony's (Onion Lake) Student Residence.^[2]

History

Beginnings of Catholic school at Onion Lake

The first Catholic mission in Onion Lake was founded in 1884 by Father Marchand. A request for a Catholic school in Onion Lake was proposed in February of 1884 by Father Marchand and Father Fafard but was refused by the Department of Indian Affairs. Nonetheless, Father Marchand instructed children at the mission until his death in the Frog Lake Massacre in 1885.^{[3][4]} In 1888, a Catholic day school was opened by Father Vachon.^[3]

The Sisters of Assumption arrived to Onion Lake in 1891, operating the day school and its transition into boarding school. Onion Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School was officially recognized by the Department of Indian Affairs on July 1st, 1894.^[3]

Towards the end of the 19th century, the government of Canada shifted funding towards industrial or boarding schools, later both termed residential schools, as opposed to day schools. These schools kept children at the school for almost the entire year, reflecting the government's goal to assimilate Indigenous children into white, Christian culture.^[3]

In 1894, the Canadian government amended the Indian Act to require all Indigenous children older than 7 to attend school.^{[3][5]} This law was enforced by the North West Mounted Police.^{[3][5]}

Buildings

The first building intended to be used as the Onion Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School burned down completely on Feb 17, 1894, before it could be used for schooling. Construction began on a replacement building in November of 1894 and was completed in November of 1895. The building was 35' by 45' and had three stories.^[3]

In 1925, it was announced that a new building would be constructed. The recent reconstruction of the Anglican boarding school spurred competition, alongside the age of the Catholic school and its lack of modern features. In 1927, a new building was constructed 4 miles south of the original location.^[3]

Fires

Two significant fires occurred during the course of the Onion Lake Roman Catholic School's operation. On September 19, 1913, a fire was started in the girls' lavatory but did not destroy the building. However, damages cost \$250. On February 10, 1928, a fire burned the school completely and classes were cancelled until September of that year. The cause of the fire was not discovered by authorities. At this time, a new school building had already been in construction and was ready to be moved into for fall of 1928.^[3]

Life at school

Arrival at school

Upon arrival at the school, each student was given a number by which they were referred.^[6] Joseph Dion, an alumnus of Onion Lake, was branded number 7, making him one of the first students to attend the school.^[6]

Assimilation and curriculum

The parents of students and any traditional Indigenous ways of being were referred to in a derogatory manner by the staff of the school, effectively alienating the children from their own families and cultures.^[3] The focus was on assimilating them into white settler culture through a curriculum that focused on the English language, catechism and training for a future as manual labourers or housewives according to traditional European gender roles.^[3] As such, every morning students went to mass and then spent a significant portion of their day on Catholic teachings.^[3] Additionally, the three and a half hours that students were permitted to spend outside, although referred to as free time by administrators, was dedicated to chores such as, in the case of the boys, wood splitting and sawing.^[6] Attempts were frequently made to keep, often orphaned, girls of 16 or older at school for longer until the principal could arrange a marriage to former students so as to keep them from reintegrating into their Indigenous culture.^[1] Accounts vary as to whether students were allowed to speak Cree. Some say that the nuns allowed students to speak the language in their free time,^[3] while others say that they were given the strap or slapped if they were caught speaking it.^[7]

Punishment and abuse

Shaving of hair and corporal punishment such as ear twisting, slapping or getting the strap were commonly used as disciplinary measures.^[3] Shirley Waskewitch, a survivor of the residential school, recounted a time that she faked a toothache to escape an abusive teacher and had one of her molars pulled out with pliers, unmedicated, by one of the nuns before being sent back to class.^[8] There was one recounted incident of a student being impregnated by one of the Oblate Fathers who was then sent home to give birth.^[1]

Food and hygiene

Students were permitted to bathe once a week on Saturdays, but no toothbrushes were given to them.^[3]

Although official records of inspection show that students were properly fed, the institution was given two weeks notice before an evaluation took place.^[3] Nancy Half, a school survivor, recounted that while the staff ate well cooked, balanced meals, the food students were offered was spoiled and to this day she cannot stomach stew because it reminds her of the rotten stew she was offered.^[7] She spoke of stealing food because she was always hungry.^[7]

Allotment of funds

By 1900, six years after its opening in 1894, the school had an ever-increasing student body and was already considered overcrowded.^[3] Requests were made to the Department of Indian Affairs for funds towards building expansion, but upon refusal they enlisted current students, usually the older boys and people from the reserve, to complete the necessary construction and upkeep.^[3] When funds were made available by the Department, school administrators often prioritized the allocation towards staff comfort rather than student needs and well-being.^[3] A request for additional heating stoves for only the principal and nuns' personal quarters was made, with the justification that it was too expensive to use the furnace to heat the entire school.^[3]

Vacation time

In the first decade or so of its existence, students were kept at school 364 days a year and were only permitted leave to travel home to their families from 8am to 7pm on July 1st.^[6] This policy later changed to allow students one month of vacation on the condition that they were well behaved during the school year.^[3] However, students who lived far from the Onion Lake reserve or were from a different reserve all together often remained at school as the cost of transportation, which was assumed by the school or diverted to the parents, was deemed too high.^[3]

Amebicide study

A study was done on 28 students of St. Anthony's following an outbreak of *Entamoeba histolytica* dysentery (amebiasis) in 1964.^[1] The illness is associated with poor sanitation and can be transmitted via contaminated water or food, infected fecal matter coming in contact with the mouth, or swallowing the bacterium from a surface or fingers contaminated with *E. histolytica*.^[9] The 28 students tested positive for the parasite and were given Furamide as treatment. Dr. R. D. F. Eaton concluded there were not enough students in the study to produce any meaningful results. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, there is little to no evidence that the parents or children were spoken to for any approval for this study.^[1]

Death toll

The death toll at Onion Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School was largely related to illnesses that would infect many students and some of the staff. Since there were no doctors on the reserve in the early years of the school, the Sisters were the ones taking care of the children when diseases erupted.^[3] Infections

would spread quickly because of the number of children overcrowding the facilities, making outbreaks difficult to contain.^{[3][10]}

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis epidemics were often infecting the Onion Lake reserve, and many cases were recorded at the school.^[3] Tuberculosis was mentioned twice in the reports between 1911 to 1920.^[3] Records show that tuberculosis caused the death of an unnamed student in 1913 and another in 1918, Christine Dumont.^[3] However, according to the agent who would report back to the Onion Lake Agency, it is unlikely that these were the only two deaths related to tuberculosis during those years.^[3]

Between 1921 to 1930, several more cases of tuberculosis were recorded. In 1921, 1923, and 1930 respectively, three girls passed away from the infection, as well as two boys sent to the hospital in 1925.^[3] The Sisters' secretary records indicate there may have been other cases of tuberculosis deaths between those years.^[3] As of 1964, cases had declined significantly with 93% of kindergarten students testing negative.^[11]

Other illnesses

In 1902 and in 1918, influenza epidemics hit Onion Lake Roman Catholic Boarding School. Both times, all children and some staff were infected. Influenza caused the death of one child in the 1902 epidemic and eleven children in the 1913 epidemic.^{[3][10]}

Other diseases such as measles and diphtheria also infected the school throughout the years. Multiple cases of measles were recorded, noted during the years 1901, 1925, 1930, 1937, and 1944, with one death mentioned.^{[3][11]} Another testimony from Joseph Dion refers to diphtheria taking the lives of many of the children attending school with him. Cases of typhoid, mumps, smallpox, whooping cough, and pneumonia were also recurrent at the school, with some children having to visit the hospital for recovery.^[3]

Testimonies

According to Joseph Dion, disease was a prominent component at the school. The most impactful illness as described by Joseph was tuberculosis, leaving such an impact on him and his classmates that they labeled students who developed the symptoms as “branded for the grave”.^[12] However, he also describes students falling ill with measles, diphtheria, chicken pox and scarlet fever.^[12]

Shirley Waskewitch described her experience isolated in an infirmary room for an extended period of time and uninformed of what she had while being treated for a lung illness during her time at the school. During this time, they kept the door locked and would only open it to place a tray inside before locking it again. She described the experience as terrifying and lonely.^[8]

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St. Joseph's Residential School

Residential Schools were institutions built across Canada, except for two provinces such as New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Starting around the 1800s residential schools were established and known as *Indian Residential Schools*. These schools were open for about a century throughout the entire country. Residential schools were mostly controlled by Christian churches but funded by the federal government of Canada and the Crown, and more than half the residential schools were controlled by Catholic churches. Their main objective was to assimilate Indigenous children in becoming civilized Canadians. More than thousands of Indigenous children who were First nations, Inuit and Métis were taken away from their family and their community. These children were not only separated from their family, but their language, culture, and identity were also taken from them. Inside the walls of these institutions Indigenous children were living in a nightmare, where anybody can understand what they went through. Many survivors of residential schools shared how they experienced neglect, abuse and lifelong trauma, which its impacts still affect Indigenous communities today.

Looking at a specific residential school known under the name of *St. Joseph's Indian Residential School*, it was an institution ruled by the Catholic church and funded by the Crown, which was in Fort William, Ontario. This school had the same goal as other residential schools in Canada, which was to assimilate Indigenous children. Established in 1870, the school functioned under several names before becoming an official *Indian Residential School* funded by the Crown and controlled by the Catholic church.

History

Indeed, this residential school is also known under many different names, such as the *Immaculate Conception Orphan Asylum*, *St. Joseph Convent Orphanage*, *Fort William Orphanage* and *St. Joseph's Indian Home*. At first, this institution was mostly ruled by the Sisters of St. Joseph. However, like other Indian Residential schools in Canada, Indigenous children were forbidden to speak their native language and to practice their culture. *St. Joseph Indian Residential School* opened its doors in 1870 and shut down in 1970, which means that this institution was open for a century. However, the school was originally an orphanage (Immaculate Conception Orphan Asylum) where many orphans were Indigenous children, but there were also non-Indigenous orphans. In 1885, the Sisters of St. Joseph's of Toronto took over, which was then taken over by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peterborough. Around spring of 1895, the institution burnt down in a fire and by the end of 1895 they built a replacement orphanage along a river near the town of Fort Williams. In 1907, they relocated once again due to companies buying the land the orphanage was located on, which led to the construction of a new building of this institution still located in Fort Williams and opened its doors in 1909. With the new location, the building was an orphanage for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, and it was also an *Indian Industrial Day School* as well as a boarding school for non-Indigenous children. Thus, after it first burnt down, this institution did not continue functioning as an Indian Residential School until 1939, where it became once again an Indian Residential school.

While the institution was running as a residential school, they had about 80 students every year. As a residential school, they had a policy where Indigenous children could not go back to their communities for a long period of time, which caused problems such as constant overcrowding. Indeed, between 1940 and 1952 the institution experienced frequent epidemics of illnesses, and they faced multiple reports of neglect and abuse upon Indigenous children. However, the institution closed its doors as an Indian Residential School in 1966, and became a hostel around 1968, but its doors closed completely in 1970.

Inner workings

In the beginning, St. Joseph's was a boarding school for only Indian girls. In the later years, boys were also accepted into boarding school, but they had to transfer out when they reached the age of 12. This was due to the fact that the school believed it was unreasonable for boys and girls of older ages to attend a boarding school together, because there was a chance of an indecent act occurring. When the boys aged out, they were often sent to other residential schools to continue their studies.

In the School, there was a curriculum the students had to follow. The school used a half day system, which had the student's doing schoolwork for half the day, then completing chores for the rest of the day. All the classes were conducted in English, and the main subjects that were taught were, reading, writing, religion, and arithmetic. In terms of their chores, the girls had to do the cooking, baking, ironing, laundry, knitting, sewing, and patching. While the boys did the general house holding and aided in the gardens (only the older boys though). Both the girls and boys were also taught how to do first aid.

The school was run by multiple sisters(nuns) who were apart of the Catholic Church. The list includes:

Sister Marie Incarnation (1897), Sister M. Sacred Heart (1902-03), Mother Francis (1904), Rev. P. Lamarche, S.J. (1905-06), Sister M. F. Clara (1910), Sister Veronica (1924), Sister M. St. George (1930), Sister Carmen (1946), Sister St. Andrew (1957), Sister St. Alban (1960-62), and Sister Immaculata (1968).

Throughout the years that the school operated on, it went through financial hardship. The Sisters often had to beg for food and clothing from people with well-off businesses, since they were always short of cash. The students who lived at the residential schools did not have their needs met, since it was difficult to find people willing to donate to the school, due to the fact that many people did not consider it their responsibility to aid with the support of Indian children. Finally, in 1882, the first request to receive government support was filed. In 1884-1885, the school was given a grant of \$300, that would continue annually until 1889. Then, in 1890, the grant would be increased to \$500, though that was still not enough.

The sisters ended up receiving assistance from the Christian Brothers, who supplied the school with fuel, vegetables, and milk. In the later years, they also supplied the school with cords of wood, bushels of potatoes, and other lines of vegetables.

Aftermath

After the shutting down of the school, the building was demolished in 1966. In 2019, there was a monument unveiled at Pope John Paul II Senior Elementary School to show recognition for what happened during the years the residential school was active. It is placed on the spot of the original building with many people tacking the podium to speak on the subject. The monument took seven years of planning and construction. It was in collaboration with the First Nation elders and the survivors and their families. The monument is made of marble, surrounded by a small garden that includes the plants of the medicine of the community's medicine wheel. It represents not only the history of the spot, but also how the town listened to the survivors. It will ensure that the stories never get lost and should be passed down through generations.

There have been many calls for investigations into the lost children of the residential school. The chief and council of Fort William First Nation called on the federal government to fund these investigations. They wanted to search three possible burial sites to search for the lost and hidden remains of the students of St-Joseph residential school. There were also requests to search around the grounds of the former

Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital. It is the hospital that the sick students were sent to, and many were never heard from them again.

It wasn't only grounds that were called to be searched, but also the records of the burials that happened at a former church that was near the school. Though there were already families that were exhumed from the cemetery, there are still questions about if everyone was found. The City of Thunder Bay is supportive of the FWFN's mission.

The Communities Affected

The land that Thunder Bay is built on is the traditional territory of the Anishinabek people, which includes the Ojibwa of Fort William First Nation. The Anishinabek community was the alliance of three tribes, the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi tribes. Each tribe was addressed by different names that translate to the older brothers (Ojibwa), the middle brother (Odawa), and the younger brother (Potawatomi).

The Ojibwa tribe is known for their birchbark canoes, copper mining, and maple syrup. They are historically known to have lived in southern Canada, including the Thunder Bay Area. By being located around the Great Lakes, there was no lack of natural resources to survive off of. It was the water that connected the people, helping them create a strong shared sense of identity and community. They followed a prophecy that they must go to the land where the food grows on water, which was wild rice. They travelled on the water with their birch canoes, allowing them to rely more on fish than hunting on land. The specific job that was assigned to this tribe in the council and alliance of the Anishinabek people, also known as the council of Three Fires, was the keepers of faith.

They were forced, like many tribes, to sign treaties that limit their access to fishing and hunting and make their land property of the government. They are still being affected today by the treaties that were signed almost 200 years ago.

The tribe has one of the larger First Nations population with around 320 000 people. The band that is located in Ontario are fighting for justice and the truth about what happened at the St-Joseph's residential school.

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St. Margaret's Residential School

St. Margaret's Residential School was part of the Canadian Residential School System in Northwestern Ontario (Fort Frances). The school ran from 1906 to 1974.^{[1][2]} It was run by the Oblates and the Grey Nuns. Many alumni have spoken out regarding the treatment they received at this school.^[3]

History

In 1905, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Department of Indian Affairs decided to shut down the St. Boniface Industrial School.^[1] It was then decided that the school would be replaced by a residential school located on the Couchiching Reserve, on the southwest shore of Rainy Lake, northeast of Fort Frances.^[1]

This new school was overseen by three brothers: Brother Théodore, Brother Eugène Gauthier, and Charles Sylvestre.^[1]

On April 1, 1906, St. Margaret's opened and remained in operation until September 1974. The school was run by the Oblates and the Grey Nuns, who were responsible for teaching and managing the school. At the beginning, the Department of Indian Affairs only authorized the school to take in 40 students.^[1]

As the school grew, the government provided more land to support it, including an additional twenty acres. During this time, a large part of the school's food supply came from agricultural work done by both the priests and the students.^[1] By 1909, the number of students had increased to 52, and by 1911 the school expanded further under the supervision of Father Philippe Valès, with help from Brother Théodore. This expansion increased the school's capacity from 40 to 60 students, and the government later provided another 90 acres of land.^[1]

In 1919, an influenza outbreak spread through the school, infecting students and staff. This led to an increase in staff to help manage the situation. After conditions improved, the government provided various supplies to support the school, such as electricity and water tanks.^[1]

In 1950, the school continued to expand, and St. Margaret's Residential School could now accept up to 100 students. In 1963, the Government of Canada provided a more modern building, relocating the students to a larger space that could house up to 120 students.^[1]

Practices

St Margaret's Residential school was run by two groups – the Oblates^[4] and the Grey Nuns.^[5] Both groups are associated with the Roman Catholic religion and have been associated to the practice of assimilation throughout Canada's history. The school was subject to arguments about whether it should be conducted as a day or residential school. The choice was made by both the government and school officials that the school would run as a residential school, where pupils would live during work and schooling.

J.N Poitras, a priest working in the school noted in a letter to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and the Principal at St. Margaret's that the skills girls and boys were independently taught could not be accomplished at a day school, and past attempts to do so had been failures. The goal was to teach girls at the school domestic skills and to teach boys skills to maintain “sustenance” as they aged. These arguments from Poitras and other religious figures prompted St. Margaret to be a Residential School where children lived full-time.^[2]

St. Margaret housed both Indigenous children and white orphans. The school ran a “half day” system, where one half of the day was dedicated to school and the other half to working. The primary goal of schooling was to teach the English language, as many children came speaking their native tongue (such as Ojibwa).^[2]

St. Margaret's often faced scrutiny from parents and its own staff for unsafe conditions. Children frequently dealt with unsanitary methods of drinking water. Often, the same cups that children used outside in the dirt were used for drinking. This resulted in many complaints about sore mouths. The sewage system was poor and often leaked into the nearby town of St. Frances. Once, the raw sewage backed up and leaked into the school itself.^[2]

Indigenous peoples who attended St. Margaret's reported that they were banned from returning home to see their family during their time at the school. One man named Glenn Jourdain^[3] shared his opinion that the purpose of this school was to “Kill the Indian Culture.” In 1960, St. Margaret's transitioned to a day school^[6] where children no longer lived. This later qualified survivors of the school for a different type of governmental compensation (see Legal Repercussions).

Stories from a living survivor

Some information about St. Margaret's Residential School comes from the testimonies and life stories of former students. One example is the account of Karen Chaboyer, an Ojibwa woman from Rainy River First Nation who attended the school as a child. She attended St. Margaret's for 9 years, from the age of six to fifteen. During her time at the school, Karen noted that she did not have the same experience as most of the other students. She shares that growing up, her parents did not teach her the Ojibwa language, which separated her from the other students. In later reflections, she stated that this “saved [her] from many spankings” that other students received for speaking their language at school.^[7]

After leaving the residential school system, Chaboyer was faced with multiple personal challenges. She described growing up in a family that was greatly affected by alcoholism, fearing she would repeat similar patterns for the rest of her life. For several years, she coped with the negative effects residential schooling had on her through alcohol and other addictive substances. Eventually, she reached out and got treatment through rehabilitation programs and began working towards recovery. During this period, she reflected heavily on the experiences and long-lasting effects that her school had on her identity and development.

Chaboyer later documented the aspects of her journey in the memoir *They Called Me 33: Reclaiming Ingo-Waabigwan*.^[8] In the book, she recounts her years at St. Margaret's Residential School and describes how the school system affected her sense of identity, which is a common experience reported by many

other former students. The memoir also discusses her past trauma and her journey to rebuilding her life after leaving the school system. Chaboyer has shared her experiences as part of much larger efforts to bring light to residential school survivors and acknowledge history.

Legal repercussions

Former students of the school were invited to [Stephen Harper's 2008 statement of apology](#) on behalf of both the Canadian Government and population. The apology was witnessed by Indigenous peoples from many communities. It attempted to address the long-term damage inflicted by the opening and continued support of Residential Schools in Canada. Leo Yerxa, a member of the Couchiching First Nation and former student of St. Margaret's was one of the people invited. He noted the difficulty of attending the apology in the House of Commons. Yerxa stated that he reexperienced past trauma, believed that the apology continued to excuse Residential School actions, and that the words of survivors were not taken into account before the statement was issued.^[9]

Elders of the Couchiching First Nation who attended St. Margaret's were noted telling other community members stories of children being buried. There is no official confirmation outside of the bodies in the school cemetery.^[9] Prior to 1953, the Department of Indian Affairs held no rules or regulations in terms of school discipline. A former student and his son, Curtis and Rudy Bruyere, found a homemade strap covered in what was deemed to be dried blood found in the walls at St. Margaret's.^[10] While other Residential Schools have had former staff arrested or criminally charged, no legal repercussions have been taken against former staff members of the St. Margaret's for abuse or maltreatment of its students.

Former students of St. Margaret's were deemed eligible by the Canadian government for multiple compensation initiatives. Those who both attended and lived at the school were able to apply for the [Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement](#).^[11] This was created at the same time as the official government apology (2008). It includes Common Experience Payment for all former members, providing individual compensation based on time spent in the Residential School System, as well as other more specified programs such as the establishment of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#).^[12]

Those who attended as only a day school were eligible to apply for the Indian Residential Schools (Gottfriedson) Day Scholars Settlement Agreement. This agreement made former students eligible for \$10,000 in individual compensation, potential financial support for legal counsel, and large sums of money towards collective reconciliation initiatives. This settlement stopped accepting claims in the fall of 2023.^[13]

Societal repercussions and impacts

St. Margaret's was one of the 130 residential schools in Canada that forced about 150,000 young Indigenous children away from their families and culture, with the purpose of assimilating them in society at large.^[14] Many Indigenous children experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in residential schools, which has created lasting impacts on individuals and communities.

At St. Margaret's, students were punished for various reasons, such as wetting the bed, speaking their language, neglecting chores, or stealing food. When students were punished, staff would use different objects, including handmade straps, horsewhips, hockey sticks, metal rods, shovels, and even their fists,

resulting in physical harm. The staff would also deliberately cut students' hair and twist their ears as a form of public humiliation.^[10]

Afterwards, many staff members were charged with assault, and some were even referred to as "sexual terrorists." The Grey Nuns and the Oblates would purposely use handmade straps and inappropriately hit students, including on their genitals. It was also said that the straps used in St. Margaret's Residential School were used in other residential schools across the province, showing that this abuse was not only happening in one school, but across the country.^[10]

It was said that "The residential schools were largely absent from strong policies and that's where so many bad things happened," said Moran about St. Margaret's Indian Residential School.^[10]

All of these different forms of abuse created long-lasting negative impacts, and many individuals who experienced them later struggled with alcoholism as a way to cope with the pain of being taken away from their families at such a young age, as well as the trauma they had carried within them for many years.^[10]

The effects of these experiences continued after students left the school. Former students have reported long-term impacts including trauma, substance use, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as higher rates of suicide.^[15] Experiences within residential schools have also been linked to intergenerational effects, including challenges related to family relationships and parenting.^[15]

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Thunderchild Indian Residential School (Delmas Indian Residential School)

The Thunderchild (also called St. Henri or Delmas) Indian Residential School was a part of the Canadian Residential School System in Saskatchewan, Canada. The school was made outside the Thunderchild reserve in what is now Delmas by the Roman Catholic Church and was in function from 1901 to 1948.

History of the school

Location

The school was originally intended to be built on the Thunderchild reserve, but Chief Thunderchild opposed its construction because most members of the community were Protestant. As a result, the Catholic Church chose to establish the institution on its mission property outside the reserve. The school was founded in 1901 by Father Henri Delmas, who worked with the Sainte-Angèle mission. In 1904, when the school requested additional funding, Indian Affairs official Martin Benson wrote that there had never been a good reason to construct the school in the first place.^[1] Although located off-reserve, the Thunderchild Residential School did not limit its intake to Thunderchild children. Students were also taken from other First Nations, including Poundmaker and Sweetgrass.^[2]

Operations

The school was operated by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. While priests were present, daily operations were largely managed by the Sisters, with student accounts noting that they had no knowledge of a formal principal, only a Sister Superior.^[2]

Truancy and Coercion

Thunderchild Residential School faced persistent issues with truancy, as many students left during annual holidays and did not return. In 1930, officials proposed removing annual leave for students with a history of truancy, but Principal N. C. D. Dubois objected, arguing that retaining “delinquents” would place excessive strain on the staff. Dubois attempted to persuade parents of the school’s value but was largely unsuccessful.^[1]

In 1931, a mother withdrew her daughter due to concerns about the girl’s declining health. Indian Agent S. L. Macdonald pressured the principal to have the child returned, and when this failed, he obtained a court order compelling her return. In 1932, Indian agents threatened a father with arrest after his son left the school, using police involvement to enforce compliance. By 1935, Principal J. H. O. Allard resorted to offering parents money to send their children to the school, a tactic that met with some success. In October 1937, police visited the Poundmaker Reserve and demanded that children be returned to the institution.^[1]

Inspections and Education

Despite these coercive practices, the school received several positive evaluations from government inspectors. In 1924, Inspector W. M. Veazey reported that the staff were energetic and the school well equipped. A 1926 inspection described the institution as nearly perfect in its operations. In 1936, another

assessment noted that the building was well lit and airy, and that both teachers and students appeared to be doing well.^[1]

However, testimonies from former students paint a different picture. Survivors consistently report that the curriculum focused heavily on religious indoctrination and manual labour, with limited emphasis on academic learning. Their accounts highlight the gap between official reports and the lived reality of those who attended the school.^[1]

Closure of the school

The school would burn down 47 years after its creation in 1948 and was never rebuilt.^[3]

Life of the students at the school

Student life in general

Life for students at Thunderchild Residential School was similar in a lot of ways to all the other Indian schools around Canada; the goal was to assimilate the indigenous children. To do so, the school had strict control over the children, the living conditions were difficult (abuses, illnesses and deaths), and the decisions made by the government officials didn't favor kindness towards the students.^[1] The church administrators also had a say on how the school was managed because the school was managed by priests and sisters^[2]. As described in survivor accounts on an IndigiNews article, children attending the school were often taken against their own will to go to school; families and communities had no say on what was happening to their children.^[2]

The early years

At the beginning, the school had a lot of difficulties with enrollment; the reason for that was because of how limited the number of students was (15 students), despite requests to increase the capacity. A large number of requests were made and many were denied. However, with time passing, the number of students started to increase and by 1923 the number of students reached a hundred.^[1] The government officials were really strict with the admissions; at one point, they removed white children from the establishment to make place for more indigenous students. This led to an overcrowded school and the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia became more frequent. This was only the start of the many tragedies that would happen in this school.^[1]

Contradictions and failure in the management of the school

The management of the school reflected certain contradictions and failures. In 1923, the government decided to pressure the school so that they could teach older boys how to farm. The problem was that the school didn't have enough land to have a farm and the equipment needed to farm was not proper. The sisters even opposed it, one sent a letter to the government explaining why they couldn't teach farming.^[1] This problem shows a disconnection between policy expectations and the resources given to the school, many more things were problematic and those problematics were decisions taken without regard for the students well-being. This example is one of many that caused children from this school to suffer.^[1]

Student mortality

A serious aspect of life at Thunderchild Residential School was the high mortality rate. During the years that the school was open, the percentage of mortality varied between 7% and 15%; this was five times higher than a non-indigenous school at this period of time.^[1] Death was often not openly discussed, and the children were not allowed to ask any questions related to this matter. Some parents were informed months later that their child was dead.^[1] The accounts of a few survivors describe that some children were buried in some unmarked or common grave close to the Saskatchewan River. Many bones were also found during the excavation of the town reflecting how cruel the management of the school was.^[1]

The fire

Previous problems

In 1940, an inspection of the school would reveal that it was in a poor state and it was recommended to shut it down before anything could happen.^[1]

The day of the fire

The fire happened in January, 1948. Smoke was spotted coming out of the basement. Soon, flames completely overran the basement and proceeded to spread across the school. The basement contained barrels of oil and fuel which only made it fiercer. It is said that the fire could be seen 65 kilometers away. According to a report made by the RCMP, the fire started in a cupboard where custodians kept their tools. A nun would discover the fire and attempt to put it out with water only to be pushed out by heavy smoke. The fire had zero casualties but completely destroyed the school and it would forever remain closed.^[4]

Reactions from students

In January 1948, the fire took the young girls that were getting prepared to go to bed by surprise. Students would go into a state of panic with the rest of the school. Students would have to wait outside in cold weather adorned with only a thin blanket for heat. Although outside in the cold, the students were cheering as the school crumbled. Some students even claiming that they're glad it happened.^[4]

Investigation

After the destruction of the school, an investigation would be launched to find the cause of the incident. The primary suspects would be a group of boys who were suspected of planning and executing the fire with the full intent of destroying the school^[1]. Accounts from girls present at the school claim that the boys planned the whole incident but could not warn the girls since their dormitories were on the other side of the school.^[4] The RCMP would question the boys and suspected two of them of starting the fire but a lack of evidence led to the investigation being dropped and the case remains unsolved^[1]. The lack of casualties and accounts claiming that the boys had gone to bed fully dressed awaiting the incident are elements used to support the narrative of the fire being planned.^[4]

Aftermath

After the fire, students would be taken back to their families and placed in different schools. Students would still feel trauma from their experience in the school. ThunderChild residential school was never rebuilt.^[4]

Memorial

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation memorial page is an official page dedicated to the children who died while attending Thunderchild Residential School. The memorial is there to preserve and remember the names of the many children who suffered and died there. The illnesses and abuses that went unreported in the official reports make the number of fatalities harder to count. The following persons are those that are on the list provided by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. ^[3]

Names and date of death:^[3]

Andrew Tootoosis	ca. 1937-09-01
Annie Oxebin	ca. 1928-05-03
Edward Lightfoot	ca. 1932-06-09
Elmirie Mirasty	ca. 1916-05-01
Emma Blackstar	1932-10-09
Emma Northwind	1930-01-30
Felix Jack	1937-03-03
François Desjarlais	1932-04-09
James Albert	1933-08-18
Joseph Myo	ca. 1927-09-13
Louisa Bull	1912-07-01
Lucia Peaychew	1928-02-01
M. Therese Whitecap	ca. 1927
Marguerite Assassayo	ca. 1912
Maria Kaspwat	1930-03-13
Maria Kruger	1928-01-13
Marie Louise Hainault	ca. 1928
Norman Kruger	1928-07-27
Patrick Tootoos	Not known
Robert Lonesinger	1927-05-02
Robert Myo	Not known
Rosalie Benson	1928-08-04
Victoria Kaspwat	1936-10-24

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