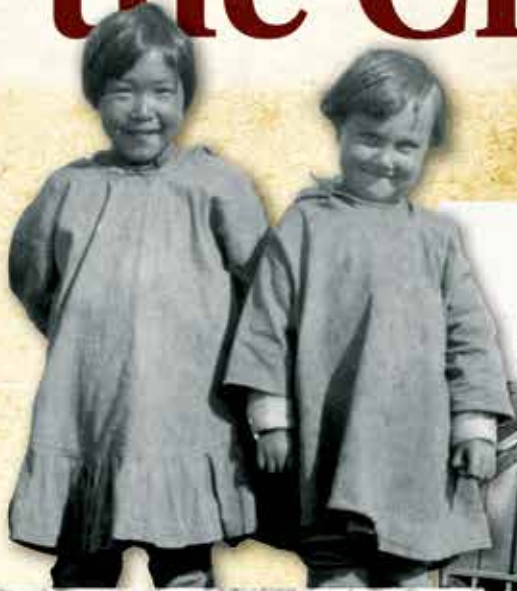


Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools

# They Came for the Children



The Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission of Canada

# Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools

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# They Came for the Children

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“

In order to educate the children properly  
we must separate them from their families.  
Some people may say that this is hard but if  
we want to civilize them we must do that.

”

Hector Langevin,  
Public Works Minister of Canada, 1883



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2012

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Truth and  
Reconciliation  
Commission of Canada

Commission de  
vérité et  
réconciliation  
du Canada

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December 31, 2011  
The Parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

To the Parties,

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is pleased to submit this Report on the history, purpose, operation, and supervision of the residential school system, the effect and consequences of the system, and its ongoing legacy, as required by the Commission's mandate.

This Report was prepared in compliance with the Commission's obligation to prepare such a Report at the two-year point of its mandate. However, it has had to have been written without a review of government and church documents, as the Commission has experienced significant delays in the collection and receipt of those documents. In addition, the gathering of statements from survivors and those otherwise involved in the schools is ongoing. The Commission anticipates that once an analysis of those documents and statements has been compiled, more historical information will become available. Based on that and its ongoing research, the Commission will be submitting a fuller and more detailed report, along with a complete set of recommendations, at the completion of its full five-year mandate.

Yours respectfully,

Justice Murray Sinclair  
Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

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# CHAPTER ONE

## To Christianize and Civilize: Canada's Residential Schools



Students played a major role in building the facilities at the Battleford school (photographed here in 1895). In 1889 the principal reported that students had built the bakery and the carpenter's shop, converted the attic to dormitories, and put up a fence separating the boys' and girls' playground. *David Ewens Collection, Library and Archives Canada, PA-182266.*

In 1883, Sir John A. Macdonald, who was both Canada's prime minister and minister of Indian Affairs, moved a measure through his cabinet authorizing the creation of three residential schools for Aboriginal children in the Canadian West. The plan was for two Roman Catholic schools, one at Qu'Appelle (in what is now Saskatchewan) and one at High River (in what is now southwestern Alberta), and an Anglican school in Battleford (in what is now Saskatchewan).<sup>1</sup> In announcing the plan, Public Works Minister Hector Langevin told the House of Commons, "In order to educate the children properly we must separate them from their families. Some people may say that this is hard but if we want to civilize them we must do that."<sup>2</sup>

These three were not the first residential schools for Aboriginal people in Canada. Missionaries from France began laying the groundwork for the residential school

system as early as 1620, but it did not take root. Parents were reluctant to send their children to the boarding schools that Roman Catholic missionaries had opened. The few children they did recruit ran away to rejoin their families as soon as they could. The French boarding school experiment was abandoned long before the British conquest of 1763.<sup>3</sup>

The idea was not revived fully until the 1830s, when the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario, founded by the New England Company, a British-based missionary society, began boarding First Nations students. In 1850 Methodist missionaries opened the Mount Elgin school in Munceytown, Ontario. From its establishment in 1867, the Canadian government funded these two schools. In the 1870s, Jesuit missionaries opened boarding schools for boys and girls at Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island, while Anglicans did the same at Sault Ste. Marie. In

addition to these schools in eastern Canada, Catholic and Protestant missionaries established schools on the Pacific coast, the Prairies, and in the North.

What existed prior to 1883 was not a residential school system, but a series of individual church-led initiatives to which the federal government provided grants. The federal government decision in that year to open three new schools on the Prairies marked a break from this practice and the beginning of Canada's residential school system. Although federal officials let the churches run the Qu'Appelle, High River, and Battleford schools, the government built them, appointed the principals (on church recommendations), and paid most of their operating costs.<sup>4</sup> These three new schools were called "industrial schools." They were expected to prepare older students for assimilation into Euro-Canadian society by training them in a range of trades including printing and boot-making, and the garment trade, along with a basic education in farming, carpentry, cooking, and housework.

The industrial schools were deliberately located away from reserves, and were intended to complement the smaller church-run boarding schools. Those boarding schools provided a more basic education, and usually were located on reserves, but at a distance from Aboriginal settlements.<sup>5</sup> Neither industrial schools nor boarding schools offered high-school education. In addition to these schools, the federal government and the churches also operated day schools on reserves across Canada. There were always more day schools than residential schools and usually more day-school students than residential-school students.

Funding was a problem from the outset. When Macdonald gave Indian Affairs the \$44,000 needed to build the first three schools, he actually cut the department's budget by \$140,000 in that year. As a result of these cuts, Indian Affairs reduced the already meagre relief rations it was providing to western Aboriginal people at a time when they were facing starvation following the disappearance of the buffalo.<sup>6</sup>

Over the next fifty years, the residential school system grew dramatically. By 1931 the government was funding eighty schools. This increase in the number of schools was a central part of Canada's western and northern expansion, and of the colonization of the Aboriginal population of Canada's new lands.



Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, 1868. Macdonald believed it was necessary to separate Aboriginal children from their parents in residential schools. In 1883 he told the House of Commons, "When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with his parents who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write." *Library and Archives Canada, Harold Daly fonds, C-006513.*

## Residential Schools and the Taming of the West

Canada's westward and northern expansion began in 1870 when Rupert's Land was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada. In today's terms, this area of land included much of northern Quebec and Ontario, all of Manitoba, most of Saskatchewan, southern Alberta, and a portion of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. For the Canadian government, the prairie West was the jewel in this imperial crown. Settling the plains would create a large domestic market for eastern Canadian industry, raise grain for export, and provide a route for a railway to the Pacific.<sup>7</sup> It was on the basis of the promise of the rail line that British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, linking the country from sea to sea.



The Canadian government distributed these medals at the signing of treaties with the Aboriginal people of the plains. The sun rising on the horizon indicated that the treaties were meant to last forever.

*Library and Archives Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, e000009998.*

Aboriginal people made up the vast majority of the residents of the new North-West Territories. Before Aboriginal lands could be transferred to settlers, there was a legal requirement that the Crown first deal with the Aboriginal title to the land. This was accomplished by the negotiation of a treaty with the First Nations. Prior to Confederation in 1867, the British government had negotiated numerous treaties with Aboriginal nations in eastern Canada. While the first of these treaties were concluded on the basis of one-time-only payments, later treaties included reserves (an area of often remote land set aside for specific bands of Aboriginal people) and annual payments.

The need for prairie treaties was pressing, since Aboriginal people were resistant to the growing Canadian presence. For example, the Ojibway in what is now northwestern Ontario opposed the ongoing passage of settlers through their territory, the Plains Ojibway turned back settlers at Portage la Prairie, and the Plains Cree halted the construction of telegraph lines.<sup>8</sup> In 1870, when the United States was spending \$20-million on its Indian wars, Canada's total national budget was \$19-million. Since Canada could not afford an Indian war, treaty commissioners were sent out, accompanied by soldiers and, later, police officers.<sup>9</sup>

Between 1871 and 1877, Aboriginal people from northwestern Ontario through to southwestern Alberta signed seven treaties. Aboriginal negotiators were seeking

economic security in a period of dramatic change and crisis. Eventually, they won provisions for medical care, livestock, schools, teachers, farm instructors, transportation, clothing, and, when needed, relief. The government negotiators also left the people with the impression they would be allowed to continue to live off the resources of their lands. By 1884 Cree leaders meeting at Duck Lake in what is now Saskatchewan concluded that the treaties were deceptions, nothing more than “sweet promises” intended to lull them into giving up their land. Reality had proven to be far more bitter. The Plains Cree found themselves forced onto small, isolated reserves. Restrictions were placed on their movement. The promised farm equipment arrived only after long delay, and often was of poor quality. The farm instructors often were incompetent. The rations, when provided, were inadequate.<sup>10</sup> The Numbered Treaties and the Pre-Confederation Treaties, reached between the Crown and sovereign First Nations, were the equivalent of international treaties. Treating them as anything less reflects a colonialist attitude and ignores the viewpoint of the Aboriginal negotiators. First Nation leaders entered into the Treaty making process for the purpose of establishing a relationship of respect that included an ongoing set of mutual obligations including land sharing based on kinship and cooperation. For its part, the Canadian government saw the treaties only as land transfer agreements. The government's policy was one of assimilation under which it sought to remove any First Nations legal interest in the land, while reducing and ignoring its own treaty obligations. Schooling was expected to play a central role in achieving that policy goal.

## Aboriginal Peoples and Education

Historically Aboriginal people throughout North America lived in successful and dynamic societies. These societies had their own languages, history, cultures, spirituality, technologies, and values. The security and survival of these societies depended on passing on this cultural legacy from one generation to the next. Aboriginal peoples did this successfully through a seamless mixture of teachings, ceremonies, and daily activities.<sup>11</sup> While differing in specifics from one people to another, traditional Aboriginal teachings described a coherent, interconnected world. Not only did they account for the creation of human beings, animals, and the physical world, they described the role that supernatural beings—often shape-changing tricksters with the power



to do good or harm—played in shaping the relationship among humans, animals, and the landscape.<sup>12</sup> There was no rigid separation of daily secular life and spiritual life. For example, in some cultures, animals were said to give themselves as gifts to the hunter. To be worthy of receiving the gift, the hunter had to participate in a ceremony prior to and after the hunt.<sup>13</sup>

Ceremonial feasts could bring people together for a variety of spiritual, cultural, and economic purposes. At such feasts, people could fulfill spiritual commitments, exchange goods and information, and impart traditional teachings.<sup>14</sup> Elders were the keepers and transmitters of this knowledge, and in some cases medicine people had specific roles in dealing with the spirit world and in curing the sick.<sup>15</sup> Just as spiritual life was part of daily activity rather than confined to a church, education was woven into everyday activities. In this way, living and learning were integrated. Children learned through storytelling, through example, and by participation in rituals, festivals, and individual coming-of-age ceremonies. In some cultures, there were spiritual societies with specific positions to which people could be promoted after undergoing proper instruction.<sup>16</sup> This teaching method was strong enough to assure the survival of identity, history, traditions, and beliefs.

Through story, children were taught how to live correctly, how not to offend spirits, and how to contribute to the community's physical survival. Angela Sidney, a Tlingit woman from the Yukon Territory in the early twentieth century, said, "They used to teach us with stories. They teach us what is good, what is bad, things like that.... Those days they told stories mouth to mouth. That's how they educate people."<sup>17</sup> Albert Canadien, who grew up fifty years later in a Dene community on the Mackenzie River, received the same sort of education: "I heard many stories that provided some explanation for why we must do certain things and why things were the way they were. A story was much better than an adult simply saying, 'You do this because I told you so!' Children tend to listen and be a little more attentive to stories than to rules."<sup>18</sup> Growing up in a Mi'kmaw community in Nova Scotia in the 1930s, Isabelle Knockwood was taught to revere elders and their knowledge: "They knew the seasonal cycles of edible and medicinal plants, and the migrations of animals, birds and fish, and they knew which hunting and trapping methods worked best with certain weather conditions."<sup>19</sup>



Hamasaka in Tlu Wulahu costume with Speaker's Staff - Qagyuhl, British Columbia, approximately 1914. Elders played a key role in the education of Aboriginal children. *Library and Archives Canada, Edward S. Curtis, Edward Curtis's The North American Indian collection, C-020826.*

From an early age, children contributed to the survival of the community. In the early twentieth century, Mary John, a Carrier woman from the British Columbia interior, took care of younger brothers and sisters while she was still a youngster, and her older sister learned to dry and smoke fish, and to hunt.<sup>20</sup> The young Inuit girl Masak was taught by her grandmother how to scrape skins, and cut and sew mukluks.<sup>21</sup> Born in 1942 in western Manitoba, Raphael Ironstand spent much of his early life travelling with his mother and father in the Duck Mountain region, living off the land. On the night before a hunt, his father would bring out the hand drum and sing traditional songs in a slow, soft voice. According to Ironstand, his father "was a survivor, using all his cunning and native guile as he tracked and stalked game for food, singing his songs when he was closing in on the prey."<sup>22</sup>

Coming-of-age ceremonies could include vision quests, in which young men, after undergoing a period of



Ojibway woman with child in carrier basket, 1858. Missionaries across North America commented on the close bond between Aboriginal parents and their children. A seventeenth-century missionary, Gabriel Sagard, observed, “They love their children dearly.” *Library and Archives Canada, Humphrey Lloyd Hime, National Archives of Canada fonds, C-000728.*

privation, might acquire a guardian spirit or experience a vision that promised them invincibility in war or long life.<sup>23</sup>

Because personal autonomy was highly regarded, scolding or disciplining children was not common. Seventeenth-century French colonists often commented that Aboriginal parents loved their children so much they were unwilling to deny them anything.<sup>24</sup> The reality was more complex. Children were not indulged: they were taught their community responsibilities and trained in self-reliance and respect for others.<sup>25</sup> For example, an Inuit child who asked for consolation might be comforted, but one who was having a tantrum might be left to cry.<sup>26</sup>

Given that the Aboriginal education system was intertwined so tightly with both spiritual belief and daily life, it is not surprising that Aboriginal people were reluctant to give their children over to others to raise. In the early nineteenth century, the Ojibway in what is now Ontario made several efforts to integrate school-based education into their communities. Peter Jones, a man of European and Ojibway descent, played an important role in establishing day schools in communities in southern Ontario in the 1830s. In 1846 Ojibway leaders in southern Ontario

made a commitment to provide financial support for local residential schools.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, dissatisfaction with the schooling led many to drop their support.<sup>28</sup>

Others remained keenly interested in extending school to their communities. In 1871 Augustine Shingwauk, an Ojibway leader from Garden River, Ontario, travelled to Sarnia, London, and Toronto to seek the support of church leaders for a proposed “big teaching wigwam” for his community. There, he said, “children from the Great Chippeway Lake would be received and clothed, and fed, and taught how to read and how to write; and also how to farm and build houses, and make clothing; so that by and bye they might go back and teach their own people.”<sup>29</sup> This initiative led to the establishment of the Shingwauk Home boarding school in 1873.

Aboriginal people on the Prairies had experience with mission schools that dated back to the 1820s. They recognized that education was necessary if they were to adjust to a changing economic and social situation, and insisted that schools, teachers, and salaries be included in the treaties negotiated in the 1870s. Government negotiator Alexander Morris assured them that “The Queen wishes her red children to learn the cunning of the white man and when they are ready for it she will send schoolmasters on every Reserve and pay them.”<sup>30</sup> The early treaties called for on-reserve schools, and from Treaty Seven (1877) onward, the treaties committed the government to pay for teachers.<sup>31</sup> There was no mention of residential schools in the treaties or the negotiation process. Indeed, in one of his reports, Morris wrote: “The treaties provide for the establishment of schools, on the reserves, for the instruction of the Indian children. This is a very important feature, and is deserving of being pressed with the utmost energy.”<sup>32</sup>

## The Davin Report

In 1879 the federal government appointed Nicholas Flood Davin, an Irish-born, Toronto-based journalist, lawyer, and, most recently, an unsuccessful Conservative parliamentary candidate, to investigate the boarding school system in the United States with an eye to establishing similar schools in the North-West Territories. At the time of Davin’s appointment, the United States was preparing to launch a new initiative: government-run, off-reservation manual training (or industrial) schools. These schools were to gather together youngsters from different reservations, separate them from their communities for



In 1879 Nicholas Flood Davin prepared a report recommending the Canadian government establish a series of residential schools for Aboriginal students in partnership with the churches. *Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A6665.*

several years, and, it was hoped, provide them with skills that would allow them to earn a living. It was expected that students' attachments to their home communities would weaken while they were at school, and they would not return to their reservations upon graduation, thus contributing to breaking up reservations and tribes.<sup>33</sup>

Davin's investigation was not extensive; appointed on January 28, 1879, he submitted his report just forty-five days later, on March 14, 1879. During that time, he travelled to Washington, where he met with US government officials and representatives of a number of Native American nations.<sup>34</sup> He then made a brief visit to a mission school in Minnesota, and met with church and government officials in Manitoba. There, he also spoke with several Aboriginal people, whom he dismissed as chronic complainers.<sup>35</sup> He was disturbed to discover that since schools had been included in the treaties, Chief Prince, among a number of other chiefs, believed they "had some right to a voice regarding the character and management of the schools."<sup>36</sup> Davin said this would be a mistake, and that the schools were best kept out of the "designing predilections of a Chief."<sup>37</sup>

On the strength of his limited investigation, Davin recommended the federal government establish a partnership with the Canadian churches to operate four industrial schools on a residential basis in the Canadian West. By separating children from their parents and educating them in residential schools, Aboriginal children would be "gradually prepared to meet the necessities of the not distant future; to welcome and facilitate, it may be hoped, the settlement of the country."<sup>38</sup> Since there were, by Davin's estimate, 28,000 Indians and 1200 Métis families in the area covered by treaty, he warned that delay would be dangerous and expensive.<sup>39</sup>

Davin recommended a partnership with the churches for two reasons. The first was moral. The type of education he was advocating would undermine existing spiritual and cultural beliefs, and it would be wrong, he said, to destroy their faith "without supplying a better" one; namely, Christianity.<sup>40</sup> The second reason was economic. He said teachers should be paid adequately, but by hiring missionaries, the government would get "an enthusiastic person, with, therefore, a motive power beyond anything pecuniary remuneration could supply."<sup>41</sup> Put more plainly, dedicated religious men and women would be attracted to residential schools, even if the pay were substandard. This was an idea that, in coming years, the federal government would test to its limits.

## To Civilize and Christianize

Government and church officials often said the role of the residential school was to civilize and Christianize Aboriginal children. When put into practice, these noble-sounding ambitions translated into an assault on Aboriginal culture, language, spiritual beliefs, and practices. Residential schools were seen as preferable to on-reserve day schools because they separated children from their parents, who were certain to oppose and resist such a radical cultural transformation.

The government's intent to break Aboriginal family bonds was clear from the outset. In 1887, Lawrence Vankoughnet, the deputy minister of Indian Affairs, justified the investment in residential schools by claiming that Aboriginal children who went to day schools "followed the terrible example set them by their parents."<sup>42</sup> The Archbishop of St. Boniface wrote in 1912 of the need to place Aboriginal children in residential schools at the age of six, since they had to be "caught young to be saved



The federal government supported not only the large industrial schools, but also smaller boarding schools, such as this Methodist school in Morley, Alberta, photographed in 1900. *David Ewens Collection, Library and Archives Canada, PA-182269.*

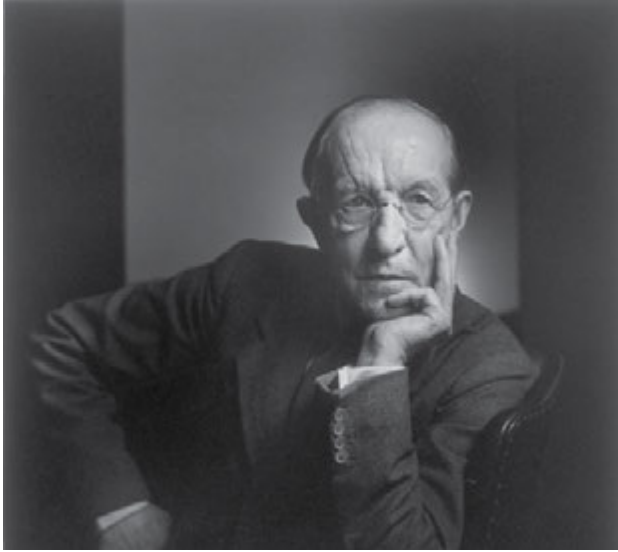
from what is on the whole the degenerating influence of their home environment.”<sup>43</sup>

These schools were not just an assault on families. They were part of a larger government policy: the elimination of the economic and social responsibilities the government took on through the treaty process. At the heart of this policy was the *Indian Act*, which, in 1876, brought together all of Canada's legislation governing Indian people. The act both defined who Indians were under Canadian law and set out the process by which people would cease to be Indians. Under the act, the Canadian government assumed control of Indian peoples' governments, economy, religion, land, education, and even their personal lives. The act empowered the federal cabinet to depose chiefs and overturn band decisions—and the government used this authority to control band governments. Indian farmers could not sell their produce without the approval of the Indian agent, a government official responsible for the day-to-day enforcement of the act. Provisions in the *Indian Act* prohibited Indians from participating in sacred ceremonies such as the Potlatch on the west coast and the Sun Dance on the Prairies. Indians could not own reserve land as individuals, nor could they take advantage of the

homestead opportunities offered to other Canadians. The act placed new restrictions on Aboriginal hunting rights. The government had the power to move the bands if reserve land was needed by growing towns and cities. The government also gave itself increasing authority to lease or dispose of reserve land without band authorization. Under the act, it was illegal for Indians to possess alcohol or to patronize pool halls.

The act's ultimate goal was to bring Indian status to an end. This policy had been articulated first in the colonial government of Canada's 1857 *Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in the Canadas*. Under this act, a male Indian (as defined by the government) in Ontario and Quebec who was fluent in either English or French, free of debt, and of good character could receive full citizenship, and fifty acres of reserve land and a share of band funds. Although this process was termed “enfranchisement,” it did not actually provide the right to vote. Instead, it removed all distinctions between the legal rights and liabilities of Indians and those of other British subjects. Since an enfranchised person ceased to be an Indian in legal terms, the government expected that with





Deputy minister of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott said in 1920 that he was working for the day when “there is not a single Indian in Canada who has not been absorbed into the body politic.”  
*Library and Archives Canada, Yousuf Karsh, Desiré Elise Scott collection, C-031512.*

each enfranchisement, the number of Indians would decline, and the size of each reserve would shrink.

Two years after Confederation, the Canadian government adopted the *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians*, which made enfranchisement the cornerstone of Canadian Indian policy. Enfranchisement was incorporated into the *Indian Act*.<sup>44</sup> From the outset, the policy was a failure; from 1859 to 1876, only one person was enfranchised voluntarily.<sup>45</sup> Since adult men were not interested in giving up their rights, government officials pinned their hopes on education.

The link between enfranchisement and residential schools was drawn clearly in 1920, when the government amended the *Indian Act* to allow it to enfranchise people without their consent, and to require school-aged Indian children to attend school. Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy minister of Indian Affairs, said the government would “continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department.”<sup>46</sup> Residential schools were not established to meet the government’s treaty obligations to provide schools (which were supposed to be on reserves), but to further its long-term aim of ending the country’s treaty obligations by assimilating its Aboriginal population.

When it came to the educational purposes of the schools, government officials over the years expressed contradictory views. In 1889 Hayter Reed, Canada’s Indian Commissioner for the Prairies, viewed the schools

as preparing people for the labour market. He said that “if the Indian is to become a source of profit to the country, it is clear he must be amalgamated with the white population.”<sup>47</sup> While some industrial schools did provide training in printing and shoemaking, for the most part the vocational training in the schools was limited to farming and

“  
*It is unlikely that any Tribe  
or tribes would give trouble  
of a serious nature to the  
Government whose members  
had children completely  
under Government control.*  
”

Indian Affairs school inspector J.A. Macrae, 1886

associated skills such as blacksmithing and carpentry for boys and homemaking for girls. Teachers and tools were often in short supply. Deputy minister of Indian Affairs James Smart argued in 1898 that: “To educate children above the possibilities of their station, and create a distaste for what is certain to be their environment in life would be not only a waste of money but doing them an injury instead of conferring a benefit upon them.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, a future Indian Affairs minister, Frank Oliver, described government policy as either training Aboriginal people “to compete industrially with our own people, which seems to me a very undesirable use of public money, or else we are not able to educate them to compete, in which case our money is thrown away.”<sup>49</sup> When the system was expanded in northern Canada in 1954, the federal government’s Sub-Committee on Eskimo Education concluded: “The residential school is perhaps the most effective way of giving children from primitive environments, experience in education along the lines of civilization leading to vocational training to fit them for occupations in the white man’s economy.”<sup>50</sup>



Qu'Appelle school principal Father Joseph Hugonnard, staff, Grey Nuns, students, and parents in 1884, the year the school opened. *O.B. Buell, Library and Archives Canada, PA-118765.*

## Safety and Security

There was a safety and security component to residential schools as well. One year after the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, Indian Affairs school inspector J.A. Macrae noted, "It is unlikely that any Tribe or tribes would give trouble of a serious nature to the Government whose members had children completely under Government control."<sup>51</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott worried in 1910 that "without education and with neglect the Indians would produce an undesirable and often dangerous element in society."<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, from the 1870s on, Canada had been sending other "dangerous elements"—the children of the urban poor—to industrial schools. Ontario's 1874 *Industrial Schools Act* allowed magistrates to commit neglected and truant children to industrial schools.<sup>53</sup> By 1900 there were four non-Aboriginal industrial schools in Ontario, two for girls and two for boys, with a total of 225 residents. Ten years later, there were also such schools in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia.<sup>54</sup> In developing plans for a residential school in the Canadian northwest, Roman Catholic Bishop Vital Grandin drew on a visit he had made to a reformatory prison in Citeaux, France. The controlled and disciplined environment he observed there, coupled with the instruction in trades and the musical education the students received, seemed, in his view, to transform the young prisoners, and would do the same for Aboriginal children. Industry, economy, cleanliness, and sobriety were the prized virtues.<sup>55</sup>

The models for the residential schools, then, were not the private boarding schools established for the children

of the young nation's elite, but reformatories and jails established for the children of the urban poor. Those institutions were judged to be failures by the early twentieth century, and largely abandoned, but the residential schools continued in operation.<sup>56</sup>

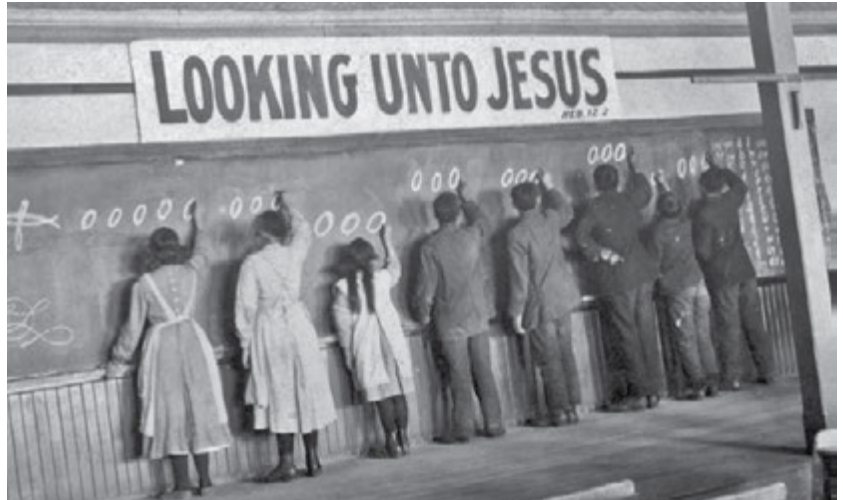
## The Role of the Churches

As recommended by Davin, from 1883 onward the Canadian government was a major partner in the Canadian residential school system. Churches were eager to embrace the partnership because church missionary societies had laid the foundation for the system. For most of the system's history, the churches had responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the schools. Nineteenth-century missionaries believed their efforts to convert Aboriginal people to Christianity were part of a worldwide struggle for the salvation of souls. This belief provided justification for undermining traditional spiritual leaders (who were treated as agents of the devil), banning sacred cultural practices, and attempting to impose a new moral code on Aboriginal people by requiring them to abandon their traditional family structures. Individual missionaries often worked in isolation and under difficult conditions. Nevertheless, they were representatives of worldwide religious institutions that enjoyed the backing of influential elites in the most powerful nations of the world, including Canada.<sup>57</sup>

The two most prominent missionary organizations involved with residential schools in Canada in the nineteenth century were the Roman Catholic Oblates of Mary



An Oblate sister and child at the McIntosh School near Kenora, Ontario. *St. Boniface Historical Society Archives, Fonds Oblate Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate, PA 821/9.*



In his 1899 book *The Indians: Their Manner and Customs*, Methodist missionary John Maclean wrote that while the Canadian government wanted missionaries to “teach the Indians first to work and then to pray,” the missionaries believed that their role was to “christianize first and then civilize.” This photograph was taken at the Methodist school at Red Deer, Alberta, sometime between 1914 and 1919. *The United Church of Canada Archives, 93.049P850N.*

Immaculate and the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England (the Anglican Church). The Oblate order, founded in 1816 in southern France, was part of a broader Catholic response to the French Revolution. The Oblates emphasized the importance of unity, discipline, and the authority of the Pope, and enforced a strict moral code.<sup>58</sup> In the 1840s, Montreal Bishop Ignace Bourget invited the Oblates to Quebec. Soon, they were active not only in Quebec but also on the Prairies, in the North, and on the Pacific coast.<sup>59</sup> As a result of their dramatic expansion through the Canadian West and North, the Oblates established and managed the majority of church-run Canadian residential schools. This educational work would have been impossible without the support of a number of female religious orders, the prominent ones being the Sisters of Charity (also known as the Grey Nuns), the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of St. Ann, and, in the twentieth century, the Oblate Sisters of Mary Immaculate. These female orders provided the school system with teachers and nurses. Although the Roman Catholic Jesuit order had a long history of missionary work among Aboriginal people in New France, in the nineteenth century, its work in residential schooling was limited to two schools on Manitoulin Island. These schools were relocated in the twentieth century to Spanish, Ontario.

The British-based Church Missionary Society was the first Anglican organization to focus solely on converting the “heathen” of the colonial world. It dispatched its first missionaries in 1802. In 1820 the Reverend John West

travelled on the society’s behalf from England to Red River, where one of his first acts was to establish a residential school for Aboriginal children.<sup>60</sup> By 1901 the Church Missionary Society supported 510 male missionaries, 326 unmarried females, and 365 ordained indigenous pastors around the world.<sup>61</sup> Training in manual labour was to be an essential part of missionary schooling. As early as 1853, the head of the Church Missionary Society was able to report: “In India, New Zealand, and all our missions, an industrial department is being added to our schools.”<sup>62</sup>

Methodist and Presbyterian mission societies, based in both Great Britain and the United States, also carried out work in Canada in the nineteenth century, and became involved in the operation of the residential school system. Women played a key role in the work of the Protestant missions. In some communities, residential schools grew out of the schools and orphanages that wives of missionaries established in their homes. Young women from Canada and Great Britain were recruited to work as nurses and teachers in remote northern schools, particularly in the early years of the system.<sup>63</sup>

Initially, the missionaries received considerable financial support from outside Canada. By the 1860s, the French branches of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Society of the Holy Childhood were supporting forty-two Aboriginal children in four Oblate schools and two orphanages in western Canada.<sup>64</sup> The 1907 construction of the Church of England residential school at Chapleau, Ontario, was paid for with money raised in



In 1893 the federal government cut its funding for the High River school (pictured here in 1896) from \$185.55 per student to \$130 per student. *Canada. David Ewens Collection, Library and Archives Canada, PA-182268.*

England.<sup>65</sup> To both Protestant and Catholic missionaries, Aboriginal spiritual beliefs were little more than superstition and witchcraft.<sup>66</sup> In British Columbia, William Duncan of the Church Missionary Society reported: "I cannot describe the conditions of this people better than by saying that it is just what might be expected in savage heathen life."<sup>67</sup> Missionaries led the campaign to outlaw Aboriginal sacred ceremonies such as the Potlatch on the west coast and the Sun Dance on the Prairies.<sup>68</sup> In British Columbia in 1884, for example, Roman Catholic missionaries argued for banning the Potlatch, saying that participation in the ceremony left many families so impoverished they had to withdraw their children from school to accompany them in the winter to help them search for food.<sup>69</sup>

While, on one front, missionaries were engaged in a war on Aboriginal culture, on another, they often served as advocates for protecting and advancing Aboriginal interests in their dealings with government and settlers. Many learned Aboriginal languages, and conducted religious ceremonies at the schools in those languages. These

efforts were not unrewarded: the 1899 census identified 70,000 of 100,000 Indian people in Canada as Christians.<sup>70</sup>

In the twentieth century, the Protestant churches established independent Canadian operations and missionary societies, and began to recruit their missionaries and school staff from within Canada. In 1925 the Methodist Church and the majority of Presbyterian congregations (along with the smaller Congregationalist Church) merged to create the United Church, which took over all the Methodist schools and many of the Presbyterian ones, as well.

The number of schools rose and fell throughout the system's history, but the Roman Catholic Church operated most of the schools, up to 60 percent of them at any one time. The Anglican Church operated about 25 percent of the schools, the United Church operated about 15 percent, and the Presbyterian Church ran only 2 or 3 percent of the schools. A United States-based Baptist church ran one school in the Yukon, and a Mennonite evangelical congregation operated three schools in northwestern Ontario. (A map showing school locations and religious affiliation is included at the back of this book.)





A group of students and parents from the Saddle Lake Reserve, en route to the Methodist-operated Red Deer, Alberta, school. *Woodruff. Department of Interior, Library and Archives Canada, PA-040715.*

While church and government officials would have their differences, their overall commitment to civilizing and Christianizing Aboriginal children gave rise to an education system that emphasized the need to separate children from their culture, impose a new set of values and beliefs, provide a basic elementary education, and implant Europe's emerging industrial work discipline.

### The Rise of the System

From 1883 onward, the federal government began funding a growing number of industrial schools in the Canadian West. It also continued to provide regular funding to the church-run boarding schools. The residential system grew with the country. As Euro-Canadians settled the Prairies, British Columbia, and the North, increasing numbers of Aboriginal children were placed in residential schools.

As the system grew, controlling costs quickly became a primary concern for the federal government: salaries, for example, were reduced in 1888. By 1892 Ottawa was so concerned about rising industrial school costs that

it switched to a per-capita funding system under which churches were paid a set amount per student. With that money, school administrators were expected to pay for maintenance, salaries, and expenses. For the industrial schools, this new formula amounted to a cut in funding. At the High River, Alberta, school, for example, funding dropped from \$185.55 per student to \$130.00 a student.<sup>71</sup> This system also provided churches with an incentive to compete with one another in recruitment campaigns, and to enrol the maximum allowable number of students, even if they were in poor health or suffering from infectious disease.

The churches came to rely increasingly on student labour. This was provided through what was known as the "half-day system." Under this system, older students spent half the school day working. The fact that students spent only half their time in class guaranteed that most of them would receive an inferior education.<sup>72</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the federal government had concluded that industrial schools were poor investments. Many had been hastily built, were unhealthy, and had trouble attracting and keeping



File Hills, Saskatchewan, school, 1948. The half-day system, under which the students often spent half the day doing chores, ended only in 1951. *The United Church of Canada Archives, 93.049P1132N.*

students. Indian Affairs minister Clifford Sifton concluded it would be better to close the industrial schools, and transfer the students and government support to smaller boarding schools.<sup>73</sup> Concern over the death rates in the residential schools gave rise to a movement within the Anglican Church to end the residential school system completely. In 1908 one of the leaders of this campaign, Samuel Blake, argued that the health conditions in the industrial schools were so dire that the government was leaving itself open to charges of manslaughter.<sup>74</sup> By 1908 federal Indian Affairs minister Frank Oliver had concluded that “the attempt to elevate the Indian by separating the child from his parents and educating him as a white man has turned out to be a deplorable failure.”<sup>75</sup>

Despite such support in high places, the campaign to end the system failed in the face of opposition from the Catholic Church and some Protestant church leaders.<sup>76</sup> It did lead, in 1910, to a contract system that increased per-capita rates, and established a number of health guidelines. By then 3841 status Indian students were enrolled in seventy-four residential schools (the term that came to be applied to both industrial schools and boarding schools),

with another 6784 in 241 federally funded day schools. It was estimated that 45 percent of Indian children were not enrolled in school at all.<sup>77</sup> While the schools were intended only for children with status under the *Indian Act*, many Métis children attended these schools throughout the system's history. (For more on the Métis experience, see Chapter Four.)

The new funding system was only four years old when the First World War broke out. The war placed a financial strain on the federal government, and led it to abandon planned improvements and repairs to many residential schools.<sup>78</sup>

In 1920 the *Indian Act* was amended to make it compulsory for status Indian children between seven and fifteen to attend either day or residential school. In reality, between them the day schools and residential schools could accommodate little more than half the school-aged Indian children.<sup>79</sup>

Even with compulsory attendance laws in place, the schools had difficulty recruiting students. The principal of the Lejac school complained of having to spend his Septembers coaxing and threatening parents who were

reluctant to send their children to school.<sup>80</sup> Over time, as enforcement of the attendance laws increased, in some locations Indian agents would show up in the fall and take children.<sup>81</sup> The churches sought and received court injunctions threatening parents with arrest if they did not bring their children to school.<sup>82</sup> In some cases, parents were jailed for refusing to do so.<sup>83</sup> Throughout the system's history, the government placed orphans or children it deemed to be delinquent or neglected into residential schools.

Parents also placed their children in the schools because they could not afford to care for them.<sup>84</sup> In some communities, parents, who were often former students themselves, reluctantly sent their children to school because it was the only educational opportunity available.<sup>85</sup>

Increases in school funding during the 1920s failed to keep pace with costs. The system suffered a fundamental breakdown in responsibility. Government officials often issued highly critical reports on the poor quality of food, harsh discipline, or overwork of students in a particular school. The churches had a standard response: to the degree that a problem existed, it could be resolved by an increase in funding. This generally brought the matter to an end. Indian Affairs regularly adopted various policies regarding health, discipline, and education, but these were not enforced consistently. At the outset, it had few school inspectors (and those it did have lacked educational qualifications). In later years, provincial school inspectors, who had no power to have their recommendations implemented, inspected the schools. From the record, it is clear that controlling costs was the prime policy objective. Having taken over the direction and funding of the church-run system in the 1880s, the federal government had enlarged the system without providing adequate funding or professional management. The schools could neither teach nor care for children.

By 1927 there were 77 residential schools with 6641 students.<sup>86</sup> In 1930 the Shubenacadie school, the only federally run school in the Maritimes, opened in Nova Scotia. It was intended for children who were orphans, deemed illegitimate, or neglected.<sup>87</sup> The first schools in Quebec, both at Fort George on James Bay (one Anglican, one Roman Catholic), opened in the early 1930s. In 1931 the system reached its peak number of schools, with eighty schools in operation.<sup>88</sup> However, even as the number of schools would decline in coming years, the number of students in attendance would increase.

The Great Depression of the 1930s led the federal government to cut funding repeatedly. The vulnerable suffered greatly during the Depression, but the children in residential schools shouldered far more than their share of the burden. In 1938, when the federal government was paying \$180 per student for residential schools in Manitoba, the Manitoba School for the Deaf and the Manitoba School for Boys, both residential institutions, were receiving per-capita payments of \$642 and \$550, respectively, from the provincial government.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the Children's Aid Society of Alberta estimated that the minimum cost of supporting a neglected child was a dollar a day, which, at \$365 a year, was double what the federal government was spending per student in Manitoba residential schools.<sup>90</sup>

“  
*...school integration  
 represents the first step  
 toward the dissolution of  
 most reserves...*

”  
*The Hawthorn Report, 1967*

## The Long Decline

By the 1940s, the failure of the residential school system was apparent. The level of academic achievement was low. In 1930 only 3 percent of the students had gone beyond Grade 6. The comparable figure for the general Canadian school population was 33 percent.<sup>91</sup> By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the federal government was supporting less than eighty Aboriginal students at the high-school level.<sup>92</sup> Even though, for over twenty years, Indian Affairs supposedly had required that all teachers have provincial teaching certificates, a 1948 government study found that over 40 percent of staff had no professional training.<sup>93</sup> This was largely the legacy of underfunding. Because residential school teachers and staff were not paid competitive wages, it was particularly hard to hire skilled vocational education instructors, who could



These students are demonstrating in Edmonton in support of a 1970 campaign to have the Blue Quills, Alberta, school turned over to a First Nations educational authority. *Provincial Archives of Alberta, J48512.*

make far more money practising their trade than teaching it at a residential school.<sup>94</sup>

The federal government solution was not to work with parents to develop a more suitable education system. Instead, it simply decided to phase out residential schooling, and transfer First Nations education to the provinces. The first step in what turned out to be a lengthy process of closing the schools came in 1949, when the federal government agreed to pay a British Columbia school board to educate First Nations students. By the 1960s, it was negotiating similar agreements with provincial governments. This process was termed “integration,” as opposed to “assimilation,” but the old goals of enfranchisement remained. *The Hawthorn Report*, a 1967 government report on the status of First Nations people, concluded approvingly that “school integration represents the first step toward the dissolution of most reserves, because education makes it possible for the Indians to adapt themselves to the White Canadian’s way of life.”<sup>95</sup>

In 1951 the half-day system was ended officially, although many schools still depended heavily on student labour.<sup>96</sup> The per-capita system, with its incentive for overcrowding, remained in place until 1957.<sup>97</sup> The federal

government began hiring teachers directly in 1954. By 1962, 90 percent of the staff was fully qualified.<sup>98</sup>

The number of students in residential schools reached 10,000 in 1953.<sup>99</sup> Two years later, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources launched a major expansion of the system in northern Canada, building a series of schools and school residences, thus increasing the number of schools even as the government sought to close the schools in the South. (For more on the northern and Inuit experience, see Chapter Three.)

During the 1950s, the schools in southern Canada came to be used largely as child-welfare facilities. In 1953 almost 40 percent of the students in the schools had been placed there because the government had judged them to be neglected by their parents.<sup>100</sup> In 1966, on the eve of Canada’s centennial celebrations, a federal study concluded that 75 percent of the students in the schools were from homes considered “unfit for school children.”<sup>101</sup> The officials who made these decisions had little understanding of Aboriginal families or culture. Where children were at risk, governments did not provide any supports to help keep families together: they simply apprehended the children. This period of dramatically increased apprehension



has become known as the “Sixties scoop,” although it continued into the 1970s.<sup>102</sup>

Funding levels were not increased to reflect the fact that the schools were caring for children with a wide range of needs.<sup>103</sup> A 1967 study of residential schools in Saskatchewan found them to be crowded, poorly designed, and highly regimented. The study said this “absence of emphasis on the development of the individual child as a unique person is the most disturbing result of this whole system.”<sup>104</sup>

Church involvement in the system was reduced dramatically in 1969, when the federal government took over the operation of most of the residential schools in the South. During this period, it also transferred responsibility for most of the northern schools and residences to the Yukon and Northwest Territories governments. Over the next decade, the government closed most of the schools, once more with little consultation with parents. When the government attempted to close the Blue Quills School near St. Paul, Alberta, the community protested. Parents and students did not want to see the school closed, they simply wanted it operated under local control. To block the closure, they occupied the school. As a result, Blue Quills, as well as a number of schools in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and the North, continued to operate under the direction of First Nations educational authorities.<sup>105</sup> While the residential school system had largely wound down during the 1980s, the last residences (the Gordon’s Student Residence and the Prince Albert Student Residence in Saskatchewan, and the Yellowknife, Inuvik, Cambridge Bay, and Iqaluit residences in the Northwest Territories) did not close until the mid-1990s.<sup>106</sup>

Just as the system was closing down, former students were speaking up. They began to mount an increasingly successful campaign to draw attention to the way they had been treated in the schools. That treatment is the essence of the residential school story. The next section of this book provides an overview of that experience from the first day through to the events that dominated daily life. It concludes with a discussion of an issue that has been in the public eye for much of the past decade: student abuse; and with one that has been largely ignored: the ways in which Aboriginal parents and children resisted the residential school system.