

Métis Children in the Schools

Métis children, with one non-First Nations parent and without Indian status, were not under the control of the Indian Act. Yet records show that many attended residential schools as live-in students or as day students who went home at night.

Métis education was a controversial subject for the Department of Indian Affairs. In 1899, it included both Métis and Treaty Indian children in its goal of assimilation. But one truth affected everything: it did not want to pay for Métis education. It fought against their presence in the schools, unless parents paid for the privilege. Exceptions arose to government policy. When attendance at a residential school was low, Métis students were sometimes taken in.

Parents at St. Paul des Métis, a farming colony in east central Alberta, opened their own residential school in 1903. Indian Affairs refused to help them with funding. After the school burned down in 1905, students returned as day students to the official Catholic residential school.

Until the late 1930s, churches in Alberta tried to convince the Department of Indian Affairs that

Background: Métis sash. Below: Métis girls with an Inuit friend (centre) at All Saints Indian Residential School, an Anglican school at Shingle Point, Yukon, in the early 1930s.



Everything Was Strange and New

“We were the first ones to arrive. They took our own clothes and put them away and that was the last time we saw our clothes. They gave us socks, shoes, shirts, pants, and bedding. We were told where to sleep in the big dormitory. We were not used to sleeping in beds. So my brother Joe said, ‘Let’s throw our mattresses on the floor.’ So we did, and we got into bed, clothes and all.”

—Simon Baker (Squamish), St. George’s Indian Residential School, Lytton, British Columbia

“Every week, in elementary school, we each got ten tokens, which were pieces of paper. Students could take a token from you if you spoke your language. At the end of the week, whoever collected the most tokens got a reward of some kind. I think it was candy but I spoke Cree, lost all my tokens, and I never got a reward.”

—Christina Sewap (Woodland Cree), Guy Hill Indian Residential School, The Pas, Manitoba

“There was never enough to eat. We got oatmeal, toast, maybe soup at lunch. Supper was made with potatoes or whatever was left over at lunchtime. Meat was mostly on holidays, on Sundays. Us



fellows who worked in the greenhouse stole potatoes from the root cellar. We roasted them in the furnace. We stole a small pig and took it down to the Grand River and cooked it. Everyone stole something to eat. As long as you didn’t get caught, you were alright.”

—Ron Styres (Cayuga), Mohawk Institute, Brantford, Ontario

Children prayed many times a day. In 1950, Swampy Cree boys kneel before bedtime with an Anglican supervisor looking on, at Bishop Horden Memorial School on Moose Factory Island, Ontario.