

In 1924 an Indian Agent in northern Manitoba said that a boy at the Mackay school in The Pas had been beaten "black from neck to his buttocks."
The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, P7538-954.

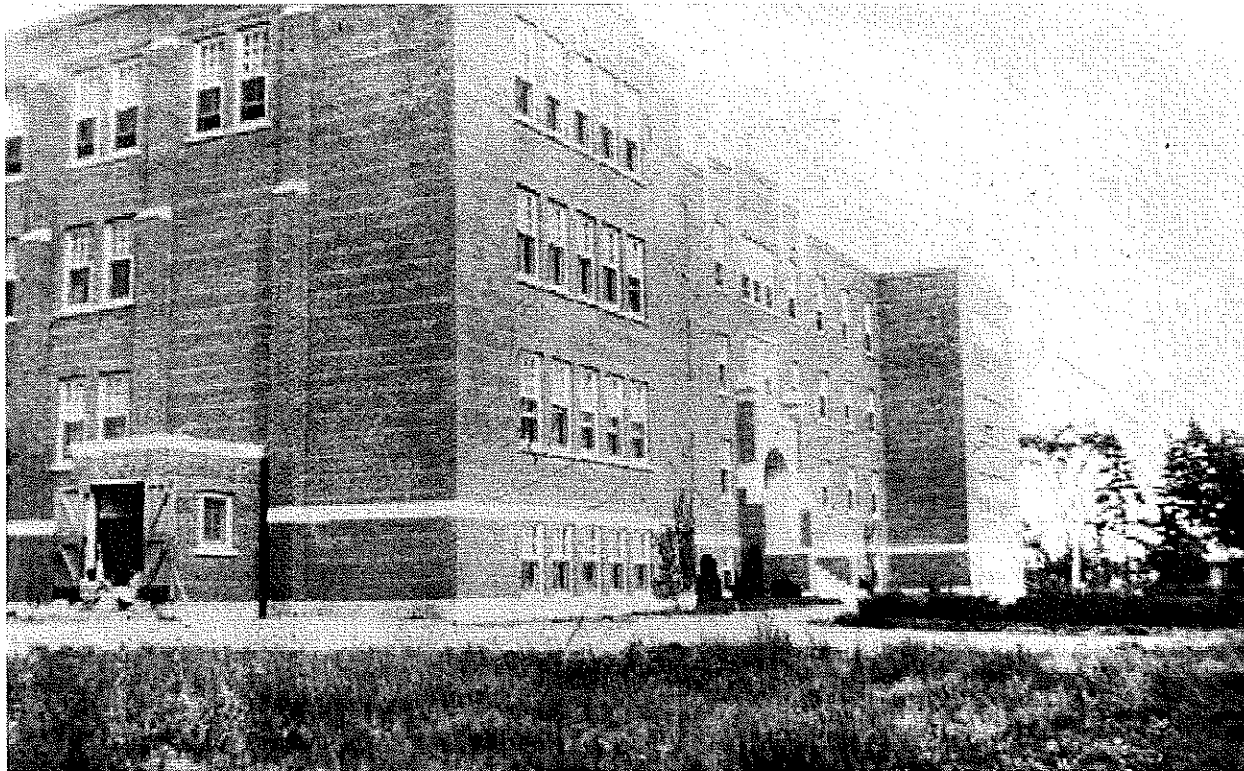
of socks.¹⁵² From the age of fourteen, Rita Joe spent much of her time working in the kitchen at the Shubenacadie school. "For that, you had to get up at four in the morning. We'd bake bread and—oh my God—every second day we'd bake about thirty-five or forty loaves. Holy Lord! And we made soup in a huge pot that was very high and very round. We'd make porridge in the morning, in a big, big porridge pot and we'd boil over two hundred eggs. It was a lot of hard work that we did in the kitchen and the cook could be cruel."¹⁵³ Domestic work could be dangerous. At Shubenacadie in 1930, two girls were taken to hospital when a dough mixer they were cleaning was started. In 1941 a girl at the same school was hospitalized when her hand was caught in a laundry wringer.¹⁵⁴

For boys, the one advantage of fieldwork was that they were not supervised closely. They could speak their own language and be with their friends.¹⁵⁵ Arthur Ledoux recalled that during the planting and harvest seasons in Saskatchewan, "we were often obliged to spend the whole day at our work place, usually a welcome relief from the drudgery of classroom studies. Some of my fondest memories to this day are from the time spent working with my friends at the residence."¹⁵⁶

Despite the fact that the half-day system was brought to an end in the 1950s, many schools retained their farm operations for several years. Its legacy was lasting: poorly housed and poorly nourished young students spent their time doing back-breaking, monotonous work to support schools that could not afford to educate them or train them. The experience of one former student, Solomon Johnston, speaks for thousands: "We cut wood, picked stones—all the worst jobs. We didn't learn anything. We didn't know anything. I read only a little now."¹⁵⁷

Discipline: "He never should have gotten a licking like that." ← group 6 start here

In 1887 High River school principal Father Charles Claude reported that to impose order at the school, he had resorted to a system of military discipline, under which no breach of regulations went unpunished.¹⁵⁸ Those who violated the rules were subject to solitary confinement, the withholding of food, and, if necessary, beatings.¹⁵⁹ This regime was not out of step with an 1899 federal government directive that "corporal punishment



In 1934 the Shubenacadie principal had nineteen students flogged following a theft at the school. A judicial inquiry supported the principal's actions. *Nova Scotia Museum: Ethnology Collection.*

should only be resorted to in extreme cases. In ordinary cases the penalty might be solitary confinement for such time as the offence may warrant, or deprivation of certain articles of food allowed to other pupils.¹⁶⁰ A similar 1895 guideline had warned that corporal punishment should be administered only by the principal, should not include blows to the head, and should not result in bodily harm.¹⁶¹ Over the system's history, several directives on discipline were issued. Despite this, the federal government showed limited interest in enforcing these guidelines. As a result, discipline in schools often exceeded the government's guidelines.

Corporal punishment was not uncommon in the nineteenth-century and even twentieth-century Canadian school system. In the 1880s, there were sixty strappings a month at Ottawa's Central School East. At the Jesse Ketchum public school in Toronto, "fighting, misbehaving in line, lying, eating in school, neglecting to correct wrong work, shooting peas in the classroom, going home when told to remain, long continued carelessness and general bad conduct" could fetch a student between four and twelve strokes on the palm of the hand.¹⁶²

However, the residential schools bore a closer resemblance to schools for neglected, truant, or incorrigible children than to public schools. In the early twentieth century, boys who ran away from the Vancouver industrial school were flogged. Runaways from the Halifax school were strapped, and repeat offenders were placed in cells, and fed bread and water.¹⁶³ In the 1890s, there was a punishment room at the Mohawk Institute that measured six feet by ten feet, with one small light over the door.¹⁶⁴ In 1902 students at the Williams Lake residential school might be placed in a small room, and put on a bread-and-water diet for a few hours or up to twelve days.¹⁶⁵

Even in an era when it commonly was held that to spare the rod was to spoil the child, many people considered the residential schools' discipline to be unnecessarily harsh. In 1896 an Indian agent said the behaviour of a teacher at the Red Deer school "would not be tolerated in a white school for a single day in any part of Canada." The agent was so alarmed by the teacher's behaviour that he kept a boy out of the school for fear he would be abused.¹⁶⁶ In 1914 a court in Brantford fined the principal of the Mohawk Institute \$400 for confining two runaway girls in a cell for two days, and whipping one of them.¹⁶⁷

These were not isolated events. A nurse found boys chained to benches for punishment at the Crowfoot school in 1921,¹⁶⁸ and at the Ahousaht school in the 1930s, an inspector reported that each member of the staff carried a strap.¹⁶⁹ At the Calgary school, all the students were put on bread and water in the early twentieth century when a laundress's moccasins disappeared (only to be found under a pile of magazines in her room a few days later).¹⁷⁰

In 1934 a group of boys stole some money from a cash-box at the Shubenacadie school in Nova Scotia. Following a school investigation, nineteen boys were flogged with

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It was awful having to watch them holding back the tears and the hurt of not being able to help—or even talk to them.

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Isabelle Knockwood, former student

a seven-thonged strap made from harness leather. Most were then put on a bread-and-water diet for three days. A judicial inquiry, appointed in response to parental complaints, excused the principal's behaviour, even though, months later, many of the boys still bore bruises on their backs.¹⁷¹

Harsh discipline prompted children to run away, often at great risk to themselves. The coroner investigating the deaths of four boys who ran away from the Lejac school in British Columbia in 1937 called for an end to the school's “excessive corporal punishment.”¹⁷²

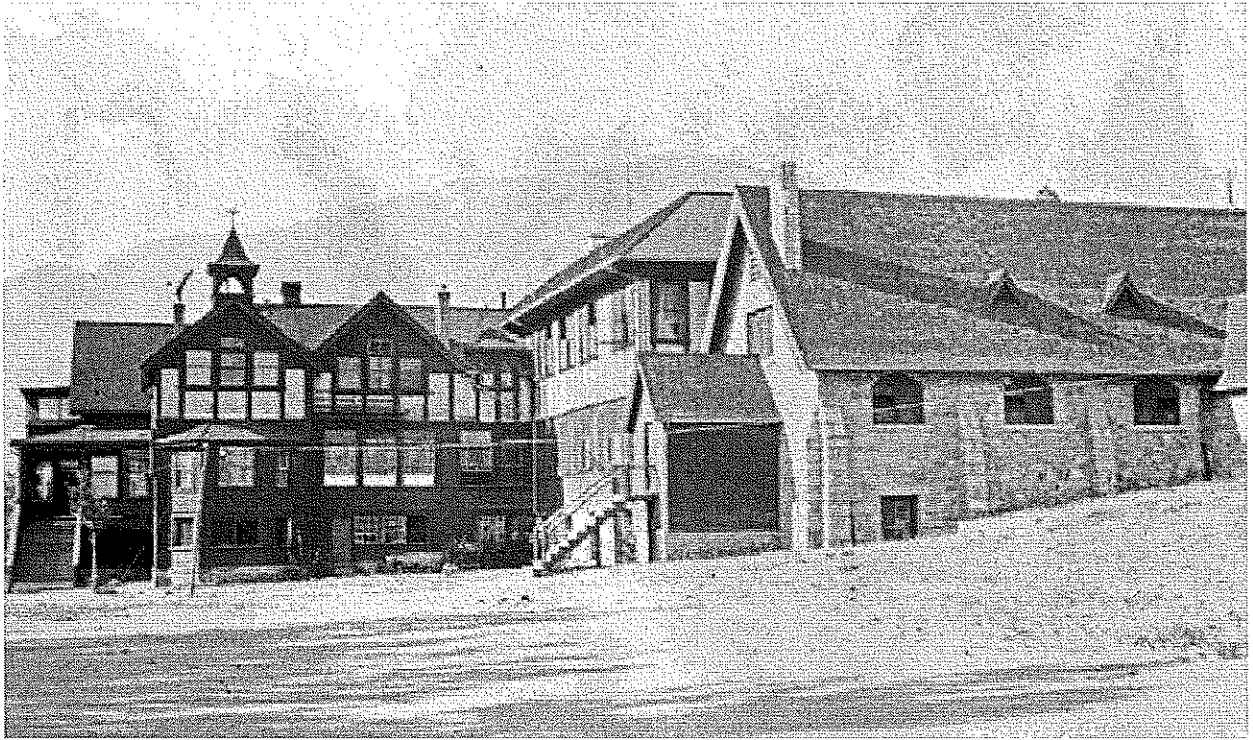
Runaways were subject to punishment and humiliation. In 1907 the principal of the Crowstand school in Saskatchewan caught a group of runaway boys, tied their hands together, and forced them to run behind his buggy back to the school.¹⁷³ Runaways from St. George's in British Columbia were chained together and forced to run back to school ahead of the principal. In other cases, runaways

were shackled to their beds.¹⁷⁴ In 1941 a boy who had run away from the Gordon's school in Saskatchewan, for fear of the principal, died of exposure.¹⁷⁵

Upon their return, runaways often had their heads shaved. At the Shubenacadie school, girls checked at mealtimes to see if their brothers or cousins had been punished. According to Isabelle Knockwood, “You should have seen the look on the faces of the sisters and cousins of the boys who walked in that refectory with bald heads. It was awful having to watch them holding back the tears and the hurt of not being able to help—or even talk to them.”¹⁷⁶ Raphael Ironstand recalled the shame of those whose heads had been shaved for speaking Cree in the 1950s. “Even though they wore scarves and toques to hide their heads, the tears were streaming down their faces. They were so embarrassed, they kept their heads bowed and eyes looking at the floor.”¹⁷⁷

Bedwetting was treated cruelly. In 1907 a boy who had been beaten for bedwetting ran away from the Norway House school. According to an Indian Affairs official, his feet were badly frozen, and it might have been necessary to amputate some toes.¹⁷⁸ Abraham Ruben had terrible nightmares on his first night at the Grollier Hall Residence in Inuvik. In the morning, he found he had wet his bed. When a nun discovered what he had done, Ruben said she slapped him in the face, and called him “a dirty pig.”¹⁷⁹ Mabel James's saddest memory of St. Michael's school “was to watch my cousin Mary and others get a spanking because of wetting the bed. They stood in line for a spanking with a hairbrush. They held their bundle of wet sheets under their arm.”¹⁸⁰ These punishments continued through the system's history. One boy recalled that when he came to the Kamloops school in 1969, “I started wetting the bed. What was really bad about it was I couldn't stop. I wanted to. I tried everything. They would take our sheets and wrap them around our heads and make us walk past all the other kids.”¹⁸¹

There are also many accounts of teachers striking students with rulers and pointers in the classroom. One Métis student from Alberta was daydreaming when “I was brought to my senses with a yardstick smashed across my back, just right about where my shoulders are.”¹⁸² At St. Philip's School in Fort George, Quebec, a frail-looking teacher was adept at rousing inattentive students with a quick rap on the knuckles with her ruler.¹⁸³ At Kamloops, Janie Marchand recalled how a beloved teacher was replaced with one who “was mean, you couldn't do anything, she'd whack you. Oh, she always had a little stick.”¹⁸⁴



Simon Baker and his friends ran away from the Lytton, British Columbia, school after witnessing a friend being beaten with a leather strap. According to Baker, "Maybe he did a naughty thing, but he never should have gotten a licking like that." *Department of Mines and Technical Surveys, Library and Archives Canada, PA-020080.*

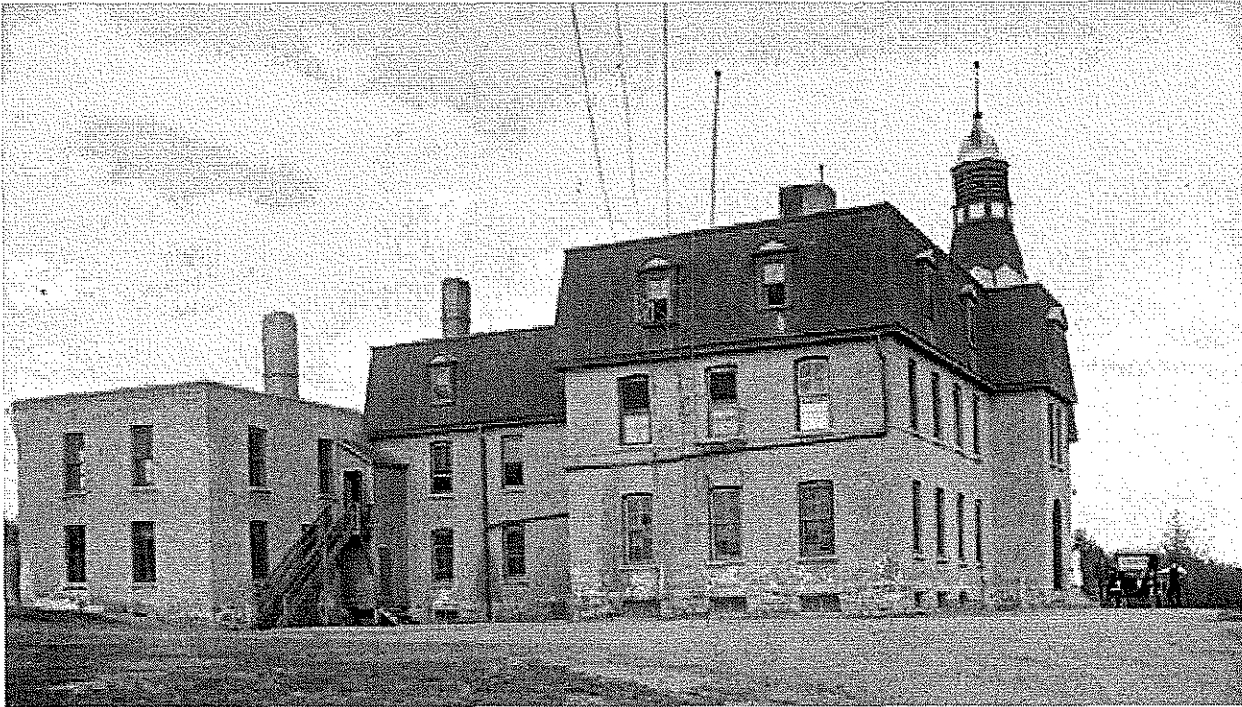
Ear pulling was another common form of discipline; according to a former Shubenacadie student, "Jesus! I used to hate them earpulls—your ear would feel like it was going to pop off—it would hurt right in the centre core. They used to like to pull ears and twist."¹⁸⁵ In 1912 at Round Lake school, the principal's wife, who was working as the matron, struck a girl so hard in the ear she was knocked to the floor. A church investigation concluded that neither the principal nor his wife could control their tempers.¹⁸⁶

For much of the period the schools operated, the federal government did not provide clear direction on discipline. By the 1930s, when a principal wrote to Indian Affairs looking for such direction, the department was forced to admit that while it had issued a circular on discipline several years earlier, it could not find a current copy of it.¹⁸⁷ On occasion, Indian Affairs officials thought their superiors were not prepared to take on the churches when principals were found to be using too much force. In 1919, when a boy who ran away from the Anglican Old Sun school was shackled to his bed and beaten with a horsewhip until his back bled, Indian Commissioner W.A. Graham tried, without success, to have the principal fired.¹⁸⁸ In 1924 no action was taken when the Indian

agent reported that a boy at the Anglican school in The Pas had been beaten "black from neck to his buttocks."¹⁸⁹ The lack of support from Ottawa led Graham to complain that there was no point in reporting abuses since the department was too willing to accept whatever excuses the principals offered up.¹⁹⁰

In the 1940s, discipline at the Brandon school was a constant source of complaint. On one occasion, four girls froze their feet in an attempt to escape the school. Parents in Saskatchewan, alarmed by reports of harsh discipline at the school, stopped sending their children there in protest. When the department sent out an inspector to discover why children kept on running away from the school, the principal prevented him from speaking to staff members in private, and allowed him to speak only to handpicked students. An Indian Affairs inspector eventually concluded that the principal was an aggressive, aloof disciplinarian. Even as the complaints continued to pile up, the principal, who had been the subject of complaints when he was principal of the Mount Elgin school, remained in office until 1955—when the church simply transferred him to a new school.¹⁹¹

Such policy as existed was usually reactive. In 1947 a serious beating given to a student at the Morley school



In the 1940s parents in Saskatchewan refused to send their children to the Brandon school because they felt their children were being mistreated at the school. *National Film Board of Canada, Photothèque, Library and Archives Canada, PA-048560.*

in Alberta led Indian Affairs to issue a policy directive on corporal punishment, which set out the type of strap that could be used, the number of blows that could be administered (no more than four per hand for students over fourteen), who could strap students, and a requirement that punishment be recorded.¹⁹²

This new policy did not prevent continued abuses. In 1953 two boys who ran away from the Birtle school were beaten badly. The Indian Affairs inspector of schools thought the principal had overstepped his bounds, but his behaviour was excused on the grounds that he had to make an example of the boys, since they had been caught running away.¹⁹³ A decade later, the principal at Cecilia Jeffrey school in northwestern Ontario was locking runaways in a room with only a mattress, taking away all their clothing (save their underwear), and putting them on a bread-and-milk diet. Students such as Pearl Achneepineskum have strong memories of corporal punishment at Cecilia Jeffrey during this period: "I knew the strap, because a man strapped me with the same one across my bare buttocks ten times because I made a noise after the lights were out."¹⁹⁴

Abuse: "I felt so dirty." *→ group 7 start here*

In October 1990, Phil Fontaine, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, called for a national inquiry into the residential school system. His call garnered national attention, particularly because he spoke of the sexual abuse he had experienced as a student at the Fort Alexander school in Manitoba. When asked how extensive that abuse had been, he replied, "If we took an example, my Grade 3 class, if there were twenty boys in this particular class, every single one of the twenty would have experienced what I experienced." Chief Fontaine also spoke of the physical abuse many students had undergone, and the way the schools deprived children of their culture. Most tellingly, he spoke of how that abuse had had lasting impacts on his life and the lives of all other former students. His coming forward, he hoped, would make it easier for others to talk about their experiences.¹⁹⁵

Aboriginal people had been raising concerns about residential schools since the Canadian government and the leading Christian churches of the day established the schools in the nineteenth century. However, until Chief Fontaine spoke out, that criticism largely had been ignored. His statement also gave support to an Aboriginal movement for justice that had been building since the 1980s. In 1994 the Assembly of First Nations released