

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



In 1990 Phil Fontaine, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, drew national attention to the residential school issue by speaking of the abuse he and his fellow students had undergone at the Fort Alexander, Manitoba, school. *Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N14950.*

Breaking the Silence: An Interpretive Study of Residential School Impact and Healing as Illustrated by the Stories of First Nation Individuals. Starting in the mid-1990s, former students began making legal claims for compensation for abuse experienced while they were at the schools. By 2002 over 12,000 former students had filed claims.¹⁹⁶

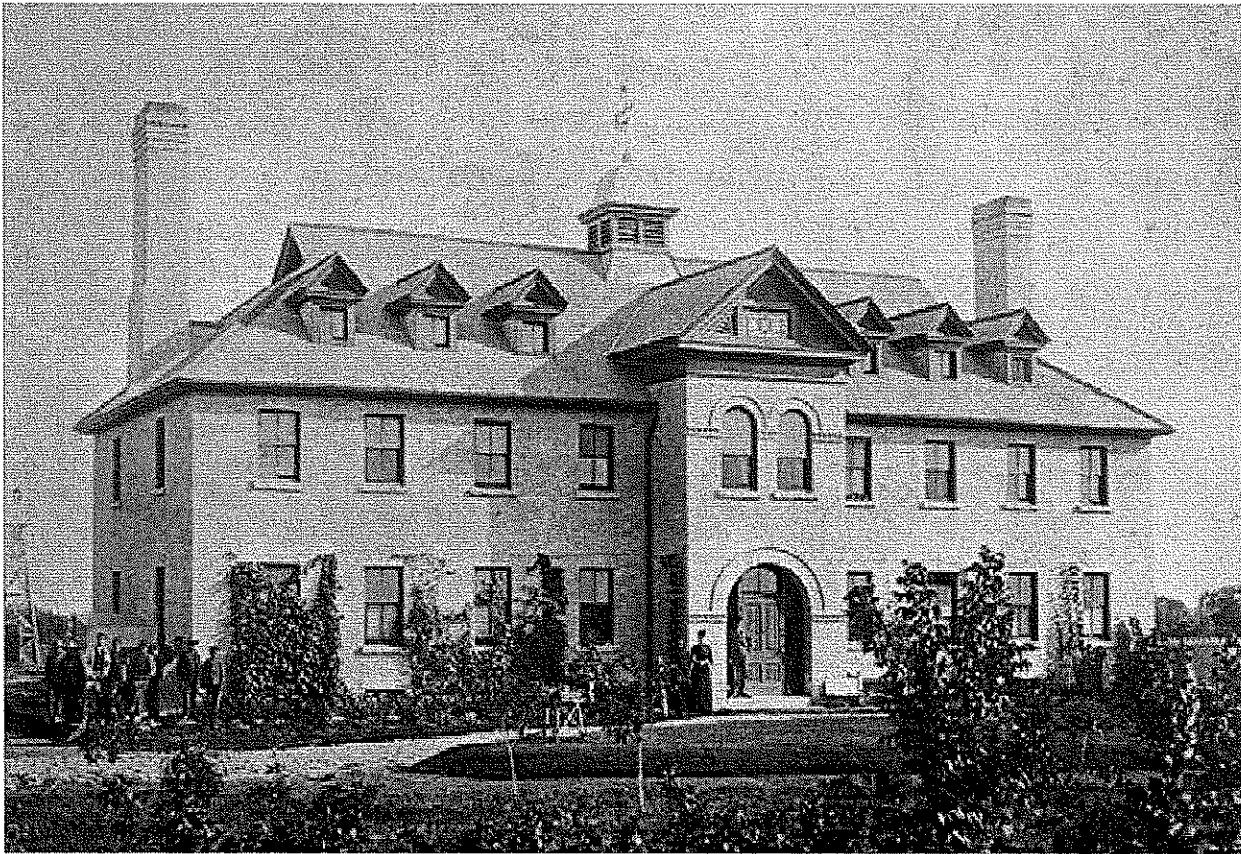
Until recently, public discussion of the sexual abuse of children, particularly of vulnerable children in institutions such as orphanages, residential schools, or jails, has been rare. The official records of the residential school system make little reference to incidents of such abuse. The victims often had no one to turn to, and the perpetrators were the very people who held authority over every aspect of their lives. In many cases, their parents either feared or respected the church officials who ran the schools. For example, after his first year at Grollier Hall in Inuvik, Abraham Ruben told his mother about the abuse and beatings there. Outraged, she took her concerns to the local priest, who reassured her the children were being well taken care of at the school.¹⁹⁷

Evidence of the problem was there from the beginning. In 1868 charges of sexually violating two students were laid against the principal of the Anglican orphanage at Great Bear Lake in Rupert's Land, leading to the orphanage's closure.¹⁹⁸ In 1884 the Oblates hired Jean L'Heureux to recruit the first students to attend the High River school,

despite the fact they had forced him earlier to leave one of their missions due to sexual misbehaviour. An Anglican pastor accused L'Heureux of "practicing immorality of a most beastly type" while he was the school recruiter.¹⁹⁹

In 1899 the principal of the Rupert's Land school was dismissed following complaints from members of the St. Peter's Band in Manitoba that he was kissing the girls (as well as beating other students).²⁰⁰ Fifteen years later, Oblate official Henri Grandin accused High River principal George Nordmann of neglecting his duties "in order to play with little girls in your room, or to read magazines."²⁰¹

Although the Crowstand school principal fired the farm instructor in 1914 for having sexual intercourse with female students in his room and the dormitory, there were other cases where abuse was tolerated.²⁰² At the Cecilia Jeffrey school in northwestern Ontario, in 1922, students complained to the assistant matron that the principal had "put their hands under his clothing" and was in the habit of kissing them.²⁰³ Following complaints from the local First Nation, Indian Affairs concluded the principal should be replaced. The Presbyterian Church argued that to dismiss him at that point would be seen by the band as a "direct result of their appeal to the Department." To allow the church to save face, the principal continued in the job for another six months.²⁰⁴



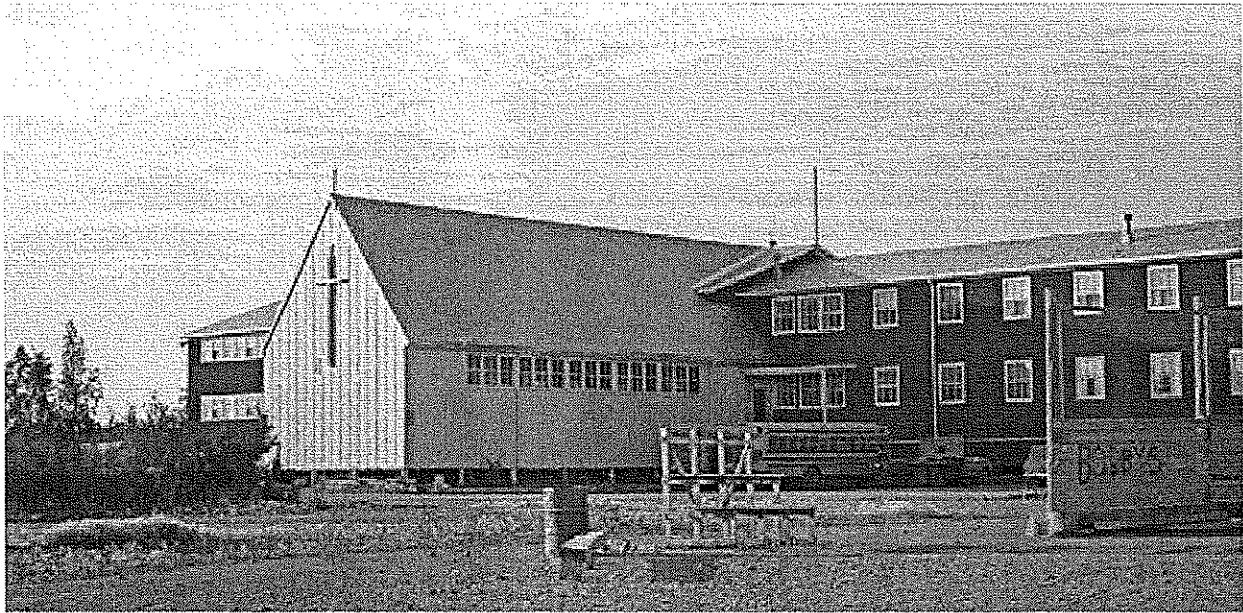
The principal of the Rupert's Land school in Manitoba was fired in 1899 after he was accused of kissing female students. *Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N16969.*

It was difficult for students to have their concerns taken seriously. When Rita Arey complained that a well-liked priest in the Northwest Territories had been grabbing her and rubbing up against her when he passed by, she was told “it was just his way.”²⁰⁵ When a female student who had been sexually assaulted by a staff member at the Kamloops school reported the matter to a supervisor, she met with a priest who, she recounts, told her to keep quiet about the assault. When the abuse resumed several months later, she and a number of girls banded together. “We made a plan that all ten of us would stick together and not leave each other anymore. If we hung out together no one would bother us, so that’s what we did, because none of us were allowed to speak.”²⁰⁶ At Fort Alexander in the 1950s, younger boys were sent to one of the priests for what was termed “ménage,” during which he would wash their genitals. Ted Fontaine recalled that the practice did not end until “we became older and bigger, and our determination to threaten, maim, hurt or even kill our tormentors gave us the power to refuse the treatment.”²⁰⁷

Not all students report such abuse. Ben Stonechild attended the File Hills school in Saskatchewan until its closure in 1949. According to him, “We weren’t molested in any way at the schools. It wasn’t like the stories you hear at other places.”²⁰⁸

The church and government preferred to deal with these matters as quietly as possible. When they took action, dismissal—or, in some cases, transfers—rather than prosecution of individuals was the norm. The lack of publicity often made it possible for a dismissed abuser to find work at another school in another part of the country. If the abuser held a position of authority in the school, he or she might preside over a reign of terror. For example, as the director of the Gordon residential school from 1968 to 1984, William Penniston Starr instituted a system of rewards and punishments as part of his systematic sexual abuse of boys between the ages of seven and fourteen. In 1993 he was convicted on ten counts of abuse.²⁰⁹

Although there had been the occasional prosecution in the past, it was not until the late 1980s that the courts caught up with many predators. In 1988 Derek



In 1998 three Grollier Hall staff members in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, were convicted of sexually abusing students. *Northwest Territories Archives, Jerome, N-1987-017: 2241.*

Clarke, a former employee of the Lytton residential school in British Columbia, pleaded guilty to sexual abuse charges. In 1995 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police initiated an investigation into all residential schools in British Columbia. By 2003, it had investigated over 900 abuse claims. Fourteen charges were laid, and jail sentences were imposed on eight former staff.²¹⁰ The staff had worked at the Roman Catholic schools at Williams Lake, Kuper Island, and Lower Post; the Anglican school at Lytton; and the United Church school at Port Alberni. In addition, former staff at the Roman Catholic Grollier Hall in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, the Anglican school at Pelican Lake, the Roman Catholic school at St. Anne in Ontario, and the Roman Catholic Coudert Hall in Whitehorse, Yukon, also have been convicted on indecent assault charges.²¹¹ In many other instances, cases did not proceed because the alleged perpetrators had died or because, with the passage of time, government lawyers concluded there was insufficient evidence on which to base a prosecution.

Overall, the residential school system often amounted to a system of institutionalized child neglect, compounded by the behaviour of specific individuals who used their authority and the isolation of the schools to physically and sexually abuse those in their care. Within this context, students could be prey not only to abuse from staff, but also from older or better organized students. Abuse of students by other students could range

from bullying and beating to sexual abuse. The extent of such abuse in the residential school system has yet to be explored.

In some schools, a culture of abuse permeated the entire institution. Within a week of his arrival at residential school, seven-year-old Greg Murdock from Fisher River, Manitoba, was raped by a group of older boys. When he reported the assault to the school staff, the boys beat him, and subjected him to another assault. Concluding that the school could not protect him, he simply stopped reporting further abuse.²¹² Where a climate of abuse existed, bullying was another common problem. Simon Baker, who went to the Lytton school in British Columbia, wrote: "When I was young, I sometimes got beat up by the older boys for something they said I did wrong."²¹³ Shirley Bear remembered the All Saints school in Prince Albert as an unhappy place. "I was shocked by all the fighting and bullying that went on. I learned to keep my mouth shut when I knew who did things they were not supposed to do."²¹⁴ One seven-year-old student at Williams Lake was beaten and assaulted by other students in a toilet stall. "I remember feeling the ugliness. I guess at that time I didn't understand what it was, but it hurt and I felt so dirty." Upon telling the principal what happened, the student was told to ask for forgiveness.²¹⁵ At the Grouard school in Alberta, it seemed to one student that everyone always was fighting. "You were always caged around by a big ten-foot-high fence. You're sort of caged animals, I guess."²¹⁶



Following the conviction of a former dormitory supervisor at the Port Alberni, British Columbia, school, former students successfully sued both the Canadian government and the United Church. *The United Church of Canada Archives, 93.049P510. (1941).*

In many schools, food was used to buy friendship or protection. Phil Fontaine recalled, “Some kids never got to eat any lard because they had to be protected during their entire time in school. Fruit was the same, you could buy protection with an apple.”²¹⁷ At the Kamloops school, Andrew Amos “learned to cope with the resident bullies who always picked on us and took our extras, such as apples, oranges, even slices of bread.”²¹⁸

The sexual and physical abuse of students by staff and other students represents the most extreme failings of the residential school system. In an underfunded, under-supervised system, there was little to protect children from predators. The victims often were treated as liars or troublemakers. Students were taught to be quiet to protect themselves.

The impacts were devastating, and continue to be felt today. Long after abuse stops, people who were abused as children remain prey to feelings of shame and fear, increased susceptibility to a range of diseases, and emotional distress. Those who have been abused run a greater risk of abusing, and have difficulty forming healthy emotional attachments.²¹⁹

Accomplishment: “My experience at the residential school was good.”

group 8 start here

Although the residential school system was a destructive system, the schools were not absolutely destructive. Between 2009 and 2011, many students have come forward to express their gratitude to former teachers at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events. Their testimony is a reminder that not all residential school experiences are identical. Although few students went to residential school willingly, once they were there, there were activities—sports, arts, reading, dancing, writing—that many students came to enjoy. Even after they were old enough to leave, some chose to stay in school and complete their education. In certain cases, students developed lifelong relationships with their former teachers. Others not only finished high school, they pursued post-secondary education. Some went on to take leadership positions in Aboriginal organizations, the churches, and in society at large. Despite the shortcomings of the system, some students were able to adjust to it, and others achieved significant accomplishments. These positive experiences stand in the shadow of