



Round Lake Indian Residential School, ca. 1940-1941, Algoma University Archives, Orval Osborne Collection /005-2012-003-001



Notre Dame students
commemorated Round Lake IRS



Pictured: Eva Alex, Ella Lewison, Barbera Gaddie, Hilsa Shesheep, Rosa Ponahee, Gracie Alexson, Jean Bunny, Marion Bear, Bella McKay, and Jean Shesheep, ca. 1945, Algoma University Archives, Lily Stevenson Fonds/006-2010-035-001



Round Lake girls on playground, ca. 1940, UCCA, 93.049P/1160

ROUND LAKE INDIAN

The Round Lake Indian Residential School (1888 - 1950) was operated by the Presbyterian Church (Foreign Mission Society and later Board of Home Missions) until 1925. The United Church of Canada operated the school from 1926 until its closure in 1950. Enrollment went from 10 students in 1884 to its peak 77 students in 1942. The school was located at the east end of Round Lake, on the north side of the Qu'Appelle River, across from Ochapowace Indian Reserve in Treaty 4 territory. Reverend Hugh McKay was principal from 1884 to 1922. The school started out as a one-room log cabin on the Qu'Appelle River in 1884 and had closed due temporarily to the North-West Resistance of 1885. In 1887, the school received its first Government grant, "which allowed \$1500 in that year, being at the rate of \$30 per annum for each of 50 pupils, but as there were only 15 pupils drawing this grant it was doubled to \$60 per capita the next year."¹ By 1888, McKay had expanded the original one-room log cabin school to accommodate a capacity for 50 students. By 1891 average attendance had not exceeded 25 and in 1892 the number of pupils decreased to 20 and the rate was \$72. In 1899, the enrollment increased to 40 pupils with an average attendance of 30.² With their Indigenous teacher F. Ataphew, a 1916 inspection reports that "the children read well and understand what they are reading about. They are particularly well advanced in arithmetic and their writing is splendid."³ A number of Métis and white children were admitted to this school.⁴ In 1950, Fire Commissioner E. E. Tiffin condemned the school and it was closed.

¹ Indian Affairs RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 1. Martin Benson to Mr. McKenna, March 7, 1899

² Indian Affairs RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 1. Martin Benson to Mr. McKenna, March 7, 1899

³ Indian Affairs RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 1. Inspector of Indian Agencies to Duncan C. Scott March 3, 1916.

⁴ <http://thechildrenremembered.ca/school-locations/round-lake/>

Inferior Education and Management

"During his 1925 inspection of the Round Lake school, W. S. Murison commented that he had never seen 'such patched and ragged looking clothing as worn by the boys. The girls had better clothing but appeared listless, indifferent and had a frowsy look.'⁵ In 1928, an inspector reported, "The junior classroom work should be under a qualified teacher instead of that it is under a mere lad and I understand that this is the first school he has taught in."⁶

An Atmosphere of Suspicion, Sordidness, and Slackness

In September 1929, shortly after coming on staff at the school as Junior Teacher Lucy Affleck (who had 18 years of teaching experience) wrote to the Department to ask several revealing and insightful questions about Indian boarding schools: "1. Is the grant made to Indian Schools by the Gov't supposed to be expended for the "board" of the children or are the children supposed to work for this board. 2. What is the per capita grant & does the "head" of the school have to give an account of the money received & spent. 3. Is this account available to the public as a "financial statement" which any of the staff may see. 4. Does the regulations permit of all pupils above grade III being detained from school for half of each day to work in the institution? 5. Is the grant proportionate to the number of days in which the pupil is in the school? 6. Is the agent or the principal of the school allowed to bring into the school against (or with) the wishes of the parents, children who are under school age in order to increase the grant? 7. Can agent or principal forbid pupils going to visit their parents at

⁵ The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 514

⁶ The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 313

holiday time? 8. Is a teacher in an Indian School bound to teach children of five or under? 9. Is the local agent for the reserve the inspector of the teacher's work, or is that the office of the P.S. inspector appointed by the Dept. of Education."⁷ Affleck also wrote to Dr. Barner, Superintendent of Indian Missions with the United Church, regarding the conditions that she felt "ought not to exist."

Consequently, "because of [her] 'disloyalty' in writing to Dr. Barner," Lucy was dismissed by Principal Ross. On November 15, Lucy persisted, writing Indian Commissioner Graham about her concerns. She was deeply critical of Principal Ross's administration, which she wrote was "such that an atmosphere of suspicion, sordidness, and slackness exists throughout, due, I believe, to the indifference and inefficiency of the principal." Affleck believed that the children suffered from the "lack of a qualified and efficient matron, and farm-instructor... The children need a 'house-mother' who would be intimately in touch with their needs, both physical and otherwise." Mrs. Ross, the senior teacher, controlled all of the work, but Affleck believed she neither had the time nor did she understand the children's needs. "*In all my 18 years experience as a teacher, I never had in my school a dirtier, more ill-clad - or more like-able - class of little folk.*" After further descriptions of the problem, Lucy wrote, "Knowing how very loath Mr. and Mrs. Ross are to spend money on clothing, fuel, supplies, repairs, etc. and how keen they are to increase the number of pupils attending (although ten girls are already sleeping double in the single beds of the girls dormitory) and how little is raise on the farm, one cannot but

⁷ Indian Affairs RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 2. Affleck to Indian Affairs, Sept. 7, 1929



During his 1925 inspection of the Round Lake Indian Residential School, W. S. Murison commented that he had never seen "such patched and ragged looking clothing as worn by the boys," ca. 1940, UCCA/93.049P/1162

"Breakfast always means porridge, bread, lard and tea—nothing else. When I asked the cook why so little porridge for each child (about 3 tbsps.) she said, 'The children don't like it and besides the pot isn't big enough to make more.' I do not wonder they do not like it. It is always cold when they get it and badly made." —Lucy Affleck, a teacher at Round Lake IRS in 1929

Click to read more about Lucy Affleck's questions about administration and her complaints about Round Lake Indian Residential School.



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RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

suspect that there is a reason why the principal wishes to keep the control of all departments absolutely in his own hands." She goes on to describe unsanitary conditions such as two "closets in the bathroom" that no longer flushed, and "an open pail" that had "been in use for a year." There was a problem keeping staff due to the "unpleasant conditions." Teacher turnover, meant that education was substandard. "The children are in low grades for their years owing to the frequent change of teachers and the hiring of unqualified teachers in the junior room," and due to the half-day spent working in senior grades. "I believe that the school education that a child gets who leaves school is Grade 3 or 4..." Duncan Scott, in a letter to Graham, discredited Lucy's concerns, writing that she was probably "disgruntled because she was discharged" and that "the Department had a letter from her, asking for considerable information, and, at that time, it was thought she might be a bit of a trouble maker." Even so, he stated that "the fact remains that conditions are not what they should be."⁸

Lack of Supervision

In 1930, Inspector Ostrander's report echoed Affleck's letters. He wrote "the Agent again points out that a suitable matron is required" and that "there is now a good farming instructor...but the Principal uses them as labourers and does the farm instructing to a great extent himself."⁹ In December, 1930, Ostrander reported that he had "several times pointed out the necessity for some organized games at this school, to teach the boys self-reliance, manliness, fair-play and all the other

qualities which prepare a boy for manhood, but only a feeble effort has been made in this connection and I think a real effort is needed."¹⁰ In February 1931, he again reported that "there is not sufficient attention given to the recreation of the children. Organized games, with someone in charge to see that every child takes exercise in some form would be beneficial."¹¹

Neglect proved fatal on May 30, 1934 when, the children had been "let out for recess at 3:00 p.m. three of them went down to the lake, unknown by any of the school staff. They commenced playing with the boat [that had drifted there from the south the day before due to a high wind] and [Joseph Louison, the boy who drowned] was in the boat. There was a high wind from the north, which carried the boat away from shore with the boy in it. The other two boys tried to catch the boat, but it drifted out into deep water and they were unable to reach it. It continued to drift out and when it was about 200 feet from shore the boy became very frightened and jumped out of it into about eight feet of water. The boy could swim a little, but as the waves were high, he soon sank." The other two boys went to inform the Principal. Two hours later Joseph's body was located.¹²

In 1940, R. A. Hoey said this school was "one of the most dilapidated and insanitary [sic] schools we have at present..."¹³ Hoey recommended the closure of this school.¹⁴

⁸ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 2. Scott to Graham, Nov. 27, 1929

⁹ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 2. Extract from Report of Mr. Indian Agent Ostrander, for the month of June, 1930.

¹⁰ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 2. Extract from Report of J.P.B. Ostrander, Indian Agent, for month of Dec. 1930

¹¹ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6332, file 661-1, part 2, Extract from Report of Mr. Indian Agent Ostrander for the Month of February, 1931.

¹² Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6334, file 661-10, part 1. Agent Ostrander to Indian Affairs, June 6, 1934

¹³ The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 463

¹⁴ The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 464

Abuse

In 1943, a student's mother complained that a staff member had strapped her son twice in the last year, one time cutting the child's arm. The first strapping was for going into the girls dorm, the second for neglecting his chores.¹⁵ In 1949, "a petition was signed by many of the parents from two bands in protest against a school teacher for abusing the children too much."¹⁶ The parents reported that "the children's report cards are very unsatisfactory, worst ever received, and she abuses the children too much." Indian Affairs official J. P. B. Ostrander did not want to replace the teacher, but he did report that the teacher "kept a strap on display in her class, saying, 'If she does not use it for punishment, at least she keeps it on display as a threat of punishment, which does not promote harmony in the classroom.'"¹⁷

Running Away and Student Death

On January 13, 1935, three boys, Percy Ochapowace, Glen Gaddie, and Alec Wasacase (ages 13 - 15) ran away the school. It was -32 degrees Celsius. The boys were separated when Wasacase and Gaddie headed west and Ochapowace headed south. Wasacase and Gaddie found their way home, but Ochapowace did not make it home. He was found frozen to death on January 17, two and a half kilometers from where the boys had parted, wearing a sweater, overalls, socks and rubber boots. ([Read more](#)). On September 10, 1936, two more boys ran away from the school: John Kakakaway and Lawrence Still. They were located on the Cowessess Reserve and returned to the school.¹⁸

¹⁵ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 373

¹⁶ NCTR school summary, p. 3

¹⁷ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 144

¹⁸ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol. 6334, file 661-10, part 1. RCMP Report