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"The new Gordon's Indian Residential School," ca. 1929, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Mathilda Wilkings/P8801-207



"Playmates," ca. 1926, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Mathilda Wilkings/P8801-1



"First day of school," ca. 1926, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Mathilda Wilkings/P8801-186

# GORDON'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

The [Gordon's Indian Residential School](#) (1888-1996) was managed by the [Anglican Church of Canada](#) from 1876 to 1946. It was located on the boundary of [George Gordon Reserve \(Treaty 4\)](#) as a Day School in 1876, and expanded for boarders in 1888. Gordon's was later managed by the Indian and Eskimo Welfare Commission from 1946 to 1969, and by the Government of Canada from 1969 until its close in 1996. The Anglican Church continued to provide chaplaincy into the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> The school was destroyed by fire on February 1, 1929 and reopened in 1930.

"The school had a long history of poor management, sexual abuse of students, and complaints that discipline was harsh and abusive. Throughout the school's later years, its management did not control the staff. The result was relentless abuse of students. There are examples of staff members belittling students' families, slapping students, banging their heads against doors, banging their heads against walls, and grabbing students by the hair. Punishments of this sort continued into the 1990s."<sup>2</sup>

## Punishment and Physical Abuse

In 1928, all except three boys who ran away were, reportedly, "punished corporally but whether severely enough to check them remains to be seen."<sup>3</sup> It is recorded that students were confined to the infirmary as punishment in the 1930s. In 1938, boys were

also put on bread and water for truancy.<sup>4</sup> In 1938, an Indian Affairs official advised against the practice of cutting girls' hair, which had been used as discipline.<sup>5</sup>

In 1957, the Saskatchewan inspector of schools was asked to investigate allegations against Principal, Rev. A. E. Southard: Two girls who had run away had their heads shaved, one girl was hospitalized after severe punishment in 1956,<sup>6</sup> and students were being bullied by the principal. When he arrived, the inspector discovered that the principal had already resigned and left the country. He was informed that in previous years the girls' hair had been closely cropped, but that at the advice of the local Indian Agent, the principal had quit this practice. It was confirmed that one girl had been hospitalized a year earlier, and "all but one staff member of the previous year had resigned in frustration over the principal's 'overbearing attitude.'"<sup>7</sup>

In 1967, employee L. C. Bishop reported that he "saw a childcare worker strike a student in the face with an open hand. The man then pulled the student from his bed and kicked him in the side. Bishop inspected the student, who complained of being beaten with a stick, and found 'one ugly red mark along the lower back, four welts, and two more red marks on his left buttocks.' Bishop noted the beating had been administered in a state of acute anger, and that there had been previous reports of students being 'kicked, slapped, and cuffed.' The sixty-

four-year-old employee was fired the following month.<sup>8</sup>

In 1977, a staff member was suspended without pay for three days for hitting a boy in the head and kicking him in the ribs to get him out of bed, before he dragged the boy to the lounge. This was in response to the boy slamming his door to express frustration at the cancelation of a trip into town to attend a hockey game.<sup>9</sup> For talking back to a supervisor in 1978, a student was struck so hard with a broom handle that it fractured her arm. In 1986 students complained that a "childcare worker had grabbed them by the throat and hair, pushed them around, banged their heads against doors, and verbally abused them."<sup>10</sup> Another childcare worker was suspended in 1985 when he threw a student out of bed. Incidents of abuse were reported throughout the 80s and into the 90s.

## Sexual Abuse and Failure to Protect Students

In 1945, Gordon's school engineer E. Holfeld (or Schofield/Holdfeld) "was kept on staff after he was convicted of assaulting a female student."<sup>11</sup> Holfeld was an alcoholic, and according to acting Principal J. H. Corkhill, "there are also several other things in his makeup which are quite bad for one mixing with young children as he does."<sup>12</sup> Principal Corkhill, however, feared that he would not be able to find a replacement for the school engineer and so

<sup>1</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 99

<sup>2</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 101

<sup>3</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 93

<sup>4</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 98

<sup>5</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 98

<sup>6</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 100

<sup>7</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 387

<sup>8</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 392

<sup>9</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 396

<sup>10</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 396

<sup>11</sup>Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 104

<sup>12</sup>The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 444

From 1949 to its closure in 1997, the Gordon's school (later, the "Gordon Residence"), operated by the Anglican Church in Punnichy was one of the worst-run schools in the entire residential school system. Students were at risk of harsh discipline and physical and sexual abuse for extended periods of time. (Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 444)



Former Gordon's residential school student Riley Burns speaks about his experience at school in Where Are the Children exhibit. Legacy of Hope.



Meal time at Gordon's, January 1954, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Grace Reed/M2008-10-P78



Memorial to Gordon's Indian Residential School, Punnichy, SK. August 20, 2008. Incorporates former school bell, cross from roof, and "1929" corner stone, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Ted Wickson/P2008-02

The CBC's *Red Road Forward* is a documentary in which former students of Gordon's Indian Residential School talk about the abuse that they experienced while attending the school. Co-produced by Brett Bradshaw and Carol Morin



"A few young girls out in the snow," ca. 1927, The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada/P8801-206

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# RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

did not dismiss him. This failure to act on behalf of students would have ongoing effects. Later that year, due to a complaint of the new Principal, D. L. Dance, Holfeld was convicted of two charges of buggery and one of attempted buggery and sentenced to two years in jail.<sup>13</sup> The damage had been done, however. In 1947, when a student was diagnosed with venereal disease, he revealed that he had been sodomized by his supervisor, William McNab, a former student who in turn claimed that he had been abused by Holfeld. Indian agent R. S. David believed that this had been an ongoing problem for years, and that the "whole school is polluted [*sic*] with it." He blamed the church authorities for "engaging ...misfits."<sup>14</sup>

In 1955, a student became pregnant by a school supervisor, for which he was prosecuted and fined.<sup>15</sup> In 1956, four girls charged the Principal, Rev. A. E. Southard, of sexual impropriety; this charge was denied by the principal and investigated by a senior teacher who exonerated him. The principal then resigned his position. There is no record of a report to Indian Affairs or the police.<sup>16</sup>

In 1993, [William Peniston Starr](#), a director at Gordon's from 1968 to 1984, was convicted of 10 counts of sexual assault of students. He admitted to having abused hundreds of young boys over a 40-year period.<sup>17</sup> ([Read more](#))

## Student Deaths

[Eleven-year-old Andrew Gordon](#) ran away from the Gordon's school on Saturday, March 11, 1939, and was found by his father frozen to death one mile from home and seven miles from school on Tuesday, March 14. His father had heard that his son was not in school by a visitor. Principal R. W. Frayling (neither teacher nor clergyman) had not organized a search nor had he informed the family, Indian Affairs, or the police.<sup>18</sup> "A coroner's jury concluded that there was no negligence surrounding Andrew['s]... death due to exposure..."<sup>19</sup> However, the Indian Affairs official Thomas Robertson believed there was negligence, writing, "the death should never have occurred." He concluded that no action should be taken, however, unless there was action by the people of the district. Superintendent Hoey sent the principal a letter outlining what should be done when students escaped from school. However, he did not send out a circular to inform other schools of how to respond to students who run away, and there is no evidence of a pre-existing policy.<sup>20</sup>

In June 1947, two girls, Myrtle Jane Moostos and Margaret Bruce, drowned when they and one other girl took a raft out on the lake. The investigation found that the children were often playing outside unsupervised, as staff had other duties to attend to inside. Many of the students had escaped the playground that day and had crossed the road and gone down to the lake, which was only a short distance away. [Acting-Principal Wickenden](#) suggested

the cause of the girl's behaviour was because "perhaps those from far away Reserves feel the restrictions and the fact that they never get home during the year....the girls concerned are those that live at a distance."<sup>21</sup>

In 1963, four students, David Thomas Anderson, Kenneth Lloyd Anderson, Peter Michael Anderson, and Bucky Arnold, all died in a fire in the basement rumpus room.<sup>22</sup>

## Bad Water and Illness

In 1945, it was reported that the water supply, a small, nearby lake, had declined due to drought, affecting supply and quality, and making those who drank it sick. The following year, it was concluded that the water was unfit for human consumption. This issue caused the school to be closed sporadically until 1950.<sup>23</sup>

## Medical Tests on Students

In the 1960s, researcher F. Vella took blood samples from students at Qu'Appelle to study the hemoglobin of First Nations people in Saskatchewan. To extend his research he requested the consent of Gordon's school to take blood samples of students there. The principal, Noel Goater, despite recognizing that the nature of the research required parental permission, gave his consent instead because he felt that getting parental consent would be an "administrative headache."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 445

<sup>14</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 445

<sup>15</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 446

<sup>16</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 104

<sup>17</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 105; <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-church-school-scandal/>

<sup>18</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 110

<sup>19</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 113

<sup>20</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 113

<sup>21</sup> [Canada Public Archives, Gordon Residential School - Deaths of Pupils, Vol. 6312](#)

<sup>22</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 75; The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 304

<sup>23</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 180

<sup>24</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 230