



Guy Indian Residential School at Sturgeon Landing, ca. 1927-1945, (Ecole Ste Therese Sturgeon Landing, Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Fonds Deschâtelets, Keewatin)



Sparks from a torch being used by maintenance staff during a repair job ignited a fire in the engine room of the Sturgeon Landing school. The fire quickly spread and burned the school to the ground. Photo: Mgr. Martin Lajeunesse O.M.I., R.P. Antonio Giard O.M.I. in front of the burning Sturgeon Landing School, on September 4, 1952, St. Boniface Historical Society Archives, The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Keewatin—Le Pas/N3637



Guy students, ca. 1937, Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Fonds Deschâtelets, Keewatin

# GUY INDIAN RESI

The Guy (St. Therese) Indian Residential School (Treaty 6), managed by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate of the Roman Catholic church (Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas), began operations in 1926 at Sturgeon Landing, Saskatchewan. Father Doyen, the first principal, was reportedly, "in the habit of taking destitute half-breed children into the School as resident pupils." These students had not been examined by a doctor, which Indian Agent Samuel Lovell thought created a "grave possibility of these children taking diseases into the School." Indian Affairs Philip Phelan directed Lovell to have the principal discharge the students because they were a "Provincial responsibility."<sup>1</sup>

On May 18, 1944 Joseph (16) and Jeremie (15) Colomb and Frank Morin (15) went missing from the school. The RCMP were notified but they could not locate the boys. They returned voluntarily unharmed on May 20, due to lack of food.<sup>2</sup> A 1949 inspection reported that "this school is overcrowded." That year, it was reported that students in residence increased from 125 to 156. By 1951 it was "woefully overcrowded" with a "rather serious epidemic" affecting 19 boys.<sup>3</sup> It burned to the ground September 4, 1952, and was then relocated to Manitoba. A temporary school opened in The Pas, Manitoba and a new school building opened in 1959, located in Clearwater Lake, Manitoba.

<sup>1</sup>Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6314 File 655-10, part 1. April 11, 1940 Samuel Lovell Indian Agent.  
<sup>2</sup>Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6314 File 655-10, part 2. RCMP report May 23, 1944  
<sup>3</sup>NCTR school narrative "Guy Hill"

Jane Glennon, a retired Social Worker, counsellor and teacher who lives in Prince Albert, spent her first year of residential school at Guy Indian Residential School at Sturgeon Landing. Jane's experience, included in the following, is posted online ([mediaindigena.com](http://mediaindigena.com)), entitled, *Sihkos' Story*.<sup>4</sup>

*In September 1951, on a nice, cool fall day, my sister and I walked through the doors of a residential school for the first time in our lives. Located in the midst of a small Saskatchewan settlement known as Sturgeon Landing (roughly 9 hours' drive northeast of present-day Saskatoon), the school was built in the vicinity of Sturgeon Lake.*

*The school was operated by an Oblate Missionary, with nuns of the St. Joseph order teaching and supervising about 200 girls and boys. Most of the students were Woodland Cree from the surrounding area. Meantime, the few native families who actually lived in the settlement had their children enrolled in a day school located on the other side of the lake.*

*Immediately upon their arrival at Sturgeon Landing IRS, the children were told by the nuns to throw away the clothes they had been wearing and to put on a kind of dark uniform instead. We were also assigned a number at that time: mine was '32.' This would serve as your "ID" throughout the year. When your number*

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mediaindigena.com/guest/issues-and-politics/sihkos-story-part-ii-sturgeon-landing-residential-school> (reprinted with permission from author)

*was called, it was usually for 'misbehaviour' (in their eyes, anyway); otherwise, it was for routine situations like being called to do chores, or seeing the doctor for your annual check-up.*

*It would only occur to me later on that this sort of treatment—where you're only known by your number—was not much different than what would happen in jail or in the army. We were like robots then: always told what to do, feel, and say. Our behaviour was always monitored. Everything had to be done in unison with the other girls. Individuality was non-existent in every aspect of our lives.*

*That first day at Sturgeon Landing, every child was subjected to delousing, whether we needed it or not. It began by soaking our heads with coal oil; I still remember that burning sensation when the sister rubbed it into my scalp. Short haircuts followed, for both boys and girls. (Happily for me, I was exempted from this procedure: as a condition of me going to school, my parents had come to an agreement with our local priest and Indian agent that my hair would be kept long. But my happiness would be short-lived. With my jet-black hair done up in pig-tails, I was an easy target for hair-pulling by jealous girls who'd lost theirs. I requested that my waist-length locks be cut off like the others soon after.)*

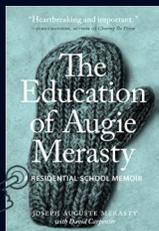
*But the de-lousing was not done: there was still the DDT. Once the nuns applied the white, pungent powder, they covered our now*

When Philip Phelan, Chief of Training Division heard word of two student deaths at Guy, (Josiah Constant and Bibiane Bighetty) he wrote to Indian Agent, S. Lovell in January 1937 to inform him that all student deaths need to be reported through a form that was to be filled out after an inquiry into the cause of death. Lovell responded that he had no such forms, and that it was impossible for him to fill out forms because he was 60 miles from Sturgeon Landing. He was then instructed to send forms to the principal to be filled out by him. Lovell replied that he had received a form from the principal but it had been improperly filled out and was spoiled. After this correspondence, several student deaths were reported.

**Students at the Sturgeon Landing school were vaccinated with BCG in 1948, leading to a low number of students who tested positive for tuberculosis in 1949. See a record of student deaths in the late 30s and 40s on pages 38 & 39.**

"The Chief and Councillors [sic]...all complained regarding the Guy School at Sturgeon Landing. They wanted more education in the classroom and they wanted the children to receive a better training in cooking, sewing and in plain carpentering. They laughed at the idea of doing fretwork and said the boys should know how to make handles for tools and cut rafters and boards. They pointed out this was the kind of work they would be required to do and so they should have training along this line." Extract from Inspector Hamilton's report dated 6th August, 1945.

### Former Student Stories



The late Joseph Auguste (Augie) Merasty's memoir, written with David Carpenter, tells of Augie's experience at residential school at Sturgeon Landing. Records show he was discharged in 1944 after nine years at Guy and that he was "very good at wood work and printing." Book Publisher: University of Regina Press. Cover Designer: Duncan Campbell. Cover Photographer: Alan Clark.



Guy students, ca. 1927-1934, Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Fonds Deschâtelets, Keewatin

# RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

*chemical-laden heads with towels. We were then sent to bed, made to wear this DDT-towel combination overnight. If anyone knew at the time that DDT could be extremely dangerous to human health, they sure didn't tell us children.*

*The 200 children at the school that year were evenly divided between 100 girls and just as many boys. They ranged in age from six to 18 years. Children were strictly segregated by gender almost the entire time; the only exceptions were at mealtime or Sunday services. Even then, girls would be placed on one side of the dining room or chapel, boys the other. Neither side was allowed to speak to the other, though I do remember some of us would sneak in a smile and wave across the gap at mealtimes now and then.*

*Not surprisingly, religion was a part of daily life for the students. The chapel was actually located within the school itself. Other than Sunday, boys and girls would attend mass separately, and on alternate days. Prayers were recited at every meal. Every week saw us stuck in confession, whether we had something to confess about or not. Just to have something to say, I remember once telling the priest that I had sworn at another kid under my breath, even though I hadn't. In fact, we all went to church so often that I remember sleepwalking down two flights of stairs towards the chapel. Only good luck prevented me from falling down and hurting myself.*

*As for the food we had to eat, it was usually rationed (i.e., single servings, small portions) and all too often rotten. Our diet consisted mostly of fish, typically whitefish. Even though it came from nearby Sturgeon Lake, the fish was not always very fresh. I recall one time when I had to keep washing down my dinner with tea and water because of how spoiled it smelled. Breakfast typically meant porridge, and almost every time it came with the privilege of having it sprinkled with mouse droppings. Eggs, meanwhile, were a rarity despite the fact there was a farm with chickens right behind the school.*

*Looking back on those ten months at Sturgeon Landing Residential School, I recall feeling deprived in almost every way: emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually. Affection between students such as touching or holding was strictly discouraged and regarded as sinful, even among siblings.*

*Constricted and restricted most of the time, I was extremely careful not to misbehave at the school. I remember vividly how sick children had to suppress their coughing at night for fear a nun would come along and give you the belt. I remember this one big, mean nun — Kimâmânaw, as some of the girls called her, or 'our mother' in Cree. I did not understand why they would honour her with that name: I distinctly remember how this Sister once grabbed a girl by the hair, then banged her head*

*on the cement basement floor of our so-called 'playroom.'*

*As I wrote in my first installment, I was inconsolable that first night at the school, despite my sister's best efforts to comfort me. But the tears kept coming, night after night. I was an introvert and internalized my pain at being separated from most of my family. But somehow I made it through to June, when I would once again rejoin my family in Southend for the summer. I tried to make the most of it. Every time I thought about returning to Sturgeon Landing, I vowed that I would find a way to not make it happen, which eventually became a plan to run away into the bush when the time came for the plane to take us back.*

*Then came one blissful day in late August 1952, when the local priest informed all the parents in Southend that the school at Sturgeon Landing had burned down. That was one of the happiest days of my life. It renewed my hope that I could now stay with my family and rebuild what was there before between us. I had yet to experience the disappointing news that another residential school would become available and all too soon take over my life again.*



Regina's St. Bernadette Catholic School decorated tiles in memory of the students who went to Sturgeon Landing school