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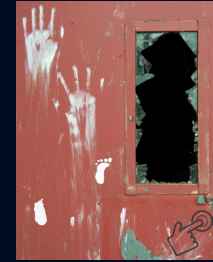
Muscowequan Indian Residential School, n.d., Missionary Oblate Sisters of St. Boniface/St. Boniface Historical Society/SHSB 28815



Muscowequan School - 1946 Grades 1, 2, and 3, Archives of the Missionary Oblate Sisters/M19/40



In 2012, St. Luke School in Saskatoon worked with the Project of Heart initiative to decorate 314 tiles, to commemorate the children who lost their lives while in residential school. Their tiles commemorated children in several schools including Muscowequan.



The back door of Muscowequan Indian Residential School in Lestock, Saskatchewan cover image comes from Lana Slezic's visual essay "If These Walls Could Talk." (*The Walrus*, August 17, 2015)

# MUSCOWEQUAN INDIAN

Muscowequan (Lestock, Touchwood) Indian Residential School was open from 1889 to 1997. The boarding school was located on Muskowekwan Reserve until 1895 when the residential school was built, aided by the federal government, off-reserve in Lestock, Saskatchewan (Treaty 4), where a stone building was available for use. The Federal Government purchased Muscowequan IRS property from the Roman Catholic Church in 1924, though the church continued to operate the school until 1969 when the federal government took over management. In 1931 a new three-storey brick boarding school opened, the former being destroyed by fire. In 1981, the Muskowekwan Band claimed 28 acres of Crown land on which the IRS was located, as part of its unfulfilled land entitlement. In 1982, the Muskowekwan Education Centre assumed responsibility for operation of the school. The building still stands (The front cover features the back door of the school).

## Unmarked Graves

According to an Indian Affairs document, an accidental disturbance of unmarked graves occurred during the installation of new sewer lines:<sup>1</sup> "On July 21, 1992, workers with N.I.S. Construction Ltd. uncovered three unmarked graves, ... On July 22, an additional 15 graves were encountered. They were located in a row paralleling the new gravity sewer main

north of residence 0210-01. The contractor indicated there was evidence of another row of graves north of the first row encountered ... All remains unearthed were placed in plastic bags and stored in a locked building."<sup>2</sup> Eventually the remains were ceremonially re-interred. An elder who attended the school as a child in the 1940s remembers that in 1944, a priest removed all traces of the cemetery used by the residential school.

## Truancy and Poor Education

In July 1924, a Yorkton RCMP officer investigated why Delia, Fred and Emile Malboeuf from Muskowekwan Reserve had not returned to school after a vacation. The officer reported that the children were "averse to returning." Sixteen-year-old Delia complained that "Father Poulette" had made "improper proposals" to her "when she was working in his office at the school." As well, the two teen boys had "received no education in the past six years, being unable to read or write at all, and were employed wholly at farm work."<sup>3</sup> J. D. McLean informed the RCMP that Indian Commissioner W. M. Graham had instructed "that no further action ... be taken in connection with the return of these children to the school."<sup>4</sup> Graham wrote to Scott about the matter, complaining that "you have not dealt

with the serious part of the Constable's report: i.e.—the charges against Father Poulette." (No further correspondence on the matter could be located.) In March of the following year, Inspector Christianson reported that "since Father Poulet has taken charge ... everything now is in first-class order ... there is also a great improvement in the appearance of the children."<sup>5</sup> Principal Poulet continued as school principal until 1932.<sup>6</sup>

In January 1928, members of the Poorman Band petitioned for better education. "We find that our school officers do not take our children on to the higher grades, but as soon as they are fit to go to a higher grade the child has to set out to work until of age to leave the school...the officials do not allow an Indian child to have any more than a very poor education...our children do not get any education higher than grade 5, and some of them do not go higher than grade 3..."<sup>7</sup>

Read about a father's removal of his son from school one day before his son's 16th birthday...

## Running Away

Edward LeRat from Cowessess Reserve ran away in October 1938. The boy told RCMP that "he had been stolen by a man who was driving

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/hunt-begins-for-long-missing-students/article1064905/?page=all>

<sup>3</sup> Indian Affairs. RG 10, Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. Yorkton Chief Report, July 25, 1924

<sup>4</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. McLean to RCMP Commissioner, August 19, 1924

<sup>5</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. Extract from report of Mr. Inspector Christianson, dated March 6th, 1925, on the Touchwood Agency.

<sup>6</sup> The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 564

<sup>7</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. Extract from petition, dated January 15, 1928, forwarded by Chief Poorman and others...

<sup>1</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 133

"Glen [Crow] and I walked up to the third floor of the residential school and the mood and tone of our conversation changed. Glen told me a story about a boy who was mistreated so badly by the Priests and Nuns of the Muscowequan School that he hung himself in the shower room. From the shower room you can see directly out of this window. I pictured that boy looking out this window as he slipped away from this earth."



Click to read this photo essay by Michael Squier about the last standing Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan

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Hockey game, ca. 1932, Missionary Oblate Sisters Archives/M19/04

"I'm Irene Favel. I'm 75. I went to Residential School in Muscowequan from 1941 to 1949, and I had a very very rough life. I was mistreated in every way. There was a young girl, she was 7 year old, [and] she was pregnant from a priest there. And what they did, she had her baby, and they took the baby, and wrapped it up in a nice pink outfit, and they took it downstairs, I was in the kitchen with the nuns cooking supper. And they took the baby into the... furnace room, and they threw that little baby in there and burned it alive. All you could hear was [this little cry, like] 'Uuh!' and that was it. You could smell that flesh cooking." (CBC Interview, July 2008)

# N RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

an automobile and brought up to the Fenwood district and thrown out." After interrogation, he "admitted that he had run away from the school ... and that his former story was fictitious.<sup>8</sup> John McDermot and Donald Folstrom ran away in August 1941. The RCMP found the boys "wandering in the village," and they had not been contacted by the school.<sup>9</sup> Three boys from Fishing Lake and two from Poorman Reserve (one was William Desjarlais) ran away from the school in October, 1944. Four of the boys were returned to the school without incident. William Thomas was found travelling with his mother. "She was against his returning to the school, but finally the boy got in the car."<sup>10</sup> In April 1945, William Desjarlais and Joseph Asapace ran away and were found "begging bread" and "wet through." They were "put to bed" at the Punnichy Detachment and returned the next day.<sup>11</sup> The same two boys ran away again in November 1945, this time using a sleigh and team they had stolen from Alfred Manitopyes, who did not wish to prosecute, so the boys were not charged.<sup>12</sup>

In his 1945 quarterly report, Indian Agent R. S. Davis reported that "the school is well run although we have had trouble there, with boys running away, and venereal disease. I

<sup>8</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 1. Oct. 17, 1938 RCMP report

<sup>9</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 2. Aug. 18, 1941 RCMP report

<sup>10</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 2. October 7, 1944 RCMP Report (Wadena); Oct. 10, 1944 RCMP report (Punnichy)

<sup>11</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 2. April 10, 1945 RCMP report; April 27, 1945, Phelan to Davis

<sup>12</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 2, November 17, 1945

understand on [sic] boy contracted this when he ran away home. Dr. Golfman advised me also that the boys' supervisor also contracted venereal disease...I have never had an official report on this..."<sup>13</sup>

In December 1945, William and Joseph were transferred to Onion Lake school. Chief Poorman wrote to ask if the principal had authority "to send a boy away from his Residential School...the boy going 15 years old."<sup>14</sup> Agent Davis was instructed by IA Phelan to let Chief Poorman know the reasons for the transfer.<sup>15</sup>

### Suicide and Sexual Assault

In the spring of 1981, a 15-year-old committed suicide. A few months later, a group of girls, aged 8 to 10, tried hanging themselves with nooses made of knotted towels and socks. "According to a police officer, 'One of the girls confirmed it was her clear intent to commit suicide.' A staff member who alerted provincial social services to the problem complained that there was not sufficient supervisory staff on duty at the residence. The staff member also complained that 'many staff frequently book off sick leaving children unattended.'"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, File 657-10, part 2. Jan. 4, 1946 Agent's Report for the Quarter ending December 31st, 1945

<sup>14</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, file 657-10, part 2. Dec. 21, 1945 Chief Poorman

<sup>15</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6320, file 657-10, part 2. Phelan to Davis, December 29, 1945

<sup>16</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 219

In 1989, the "residence suspended two boys for their involvement in 'an assault with sexual overtones' on a female student. After a police investigation and a meeting with the parents of the students involved, the boys were reinstated."<sup>17</sup>

### Objections to Army Cadet Training

"Chief Poorman of the Poorman Band visited the Indian Affairs office in Ottawa in 1945 to complain that at the Lestock 'the pupils were given too much drilling, with a consequent absence from the classroom.' The principal said that other than the three days of class time that had been given over to inspection during the course of the year, the cadet training had taken place in the evening, usually for about an hour and an half, once a week."<sup>18</sup>

### School is Dirty and the Children Neglected

Far from Martin Benson's 1904 claim that this school was "the most satisfactorily managed in the territories,"<sup>19</sup> Nurse LeDrew's 1922 report claimed "the school is dirty and that the children are neglected."<sup>20</sup> In 1923, Nurse I. M. Lucas reported, "the children at this school do not get the proper nourishing food, or enough. They get no milk and no vegetables, except potatoes, and very small portions."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 459

<sup>18</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 485

<sup>19</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10 Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. Benson to Indian Affairs, November 15, 1904.

<sup>20</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6318, file 657-1, part 1. Graham to Indian Affairs, Sept. 13, 1922

<sup>21</sup> The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 495