



The first Roman Catholic IRS at Onion Lake, ca. 1890s, Glenbow Museum/PA-881-15



The second St. Anthony's Residential School building ca. 192-, Alberta on Record, Musée Heritage Museum, Edmond Pratt/ CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-384



Father Pratt and children, ca. 1928-193-, Musée Heritage Museum, Edmond Pratt/ CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-335

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The third St. Anthony's Residential School building at Onion Lake (built using Duck Lake plans), ca. 1928-193-, Musée Heritage Museum, Edmond Pratt OMI/CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-380



Onion Lake school, ca. 1938, Archives Deschâtelets-NDC, Fonds Deschâtelets, Keewatin

# ST. ANTHONY INDIAN

The St. Anthony's (Onion Lake) Indian Residential School was operated by the Roman Catholic Church from 1894 until its closure in 1974 (managed by the Sisters of the Assumption, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Oblate Indian and Eskimo Council). The first and second buildings were located on the Seekaskootch Onion Lake Reserve (Treaty 6). The third constructed by 1927 was located four miles (6.4 kms) south of the original. Over the years, the fathers had been requesting a grant to open a boarding school, but were denied because there was already an Anglican school at Onion Lake. Three Sisters arrived in Onion Lake in 1891 to serve in the log day school that Father Nerre built and by 1892 they had opened a boarding school, which was officially recognized by the government in 1894. After the Sisters arrived, a new school was built by the members of the reserve. The new school was destroyed by fire in 1894. A new school was finished the following year. Oblate Father Adéorat Therien served as first principal of the official boarding school from 1894 - 1896.<sup>1</sup> The second school was destroyed by fire in 1928 (after the construction of a new IRS building had begun at a new location).<sup>2</sup>

## Resistance to Admission Application

Principal W. Comiré wrote in 1897 that parents "seem unwilling to sign the forms of application for admission required by the department. They prefer to keep the liberty of leaving or withdrawing their children from the school at will."<sup>3</sup>

## Illness and Death

"A 1901 outbreak of measles was initially reported as smallpox."<sup>4</sup> In May 1902, all the children had influenza, one pupil died and another had little hope of recovery. In 1911, a parent requested a doctor visit the school because one of his children had died and another was ill. The following day, a doctor quarantined the school for diphtheria. One student had typhoid fever. An influenza epidemic took the lives of 11 students in 1918.<sup>5</sup> In 1937 and 1944 the school experienced a measles epidemic. In 1947, 78 students were ill with an unspecified epidemic. Later, one student died in hospital from the illness. In 1957, many students were sick with the flu, some vomited blood and others were in a coma. In 1961, some students had the mumps.

## Amebic Study

A 1964 outbreak of Entamoeba histolytica dysentery (amoebiasis) in the Loon Lake district of Saskatchewan "led Indian Health

Services to initiate a mass treatment program, including treatment of the students at two residential schools. The illness is ... associated with poor sanitation. As part of the treatment campaign, Dr. R. D. F. Eaton of the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Hospital conducted what was described as a 'survey and trial' of the effectiveness of the drug Furamide in reducing gastrointestinal parasites at the Onion Lake school ... Twenty-eight students at the school were identified as having been infected by the parasite. The infected students who were in Kindergarten and in grades 2, 4, 6, and 8 were treated with Furamide for ten days, while the infected students in the other grades were given the same drug, but for only five days. Since one student ran away during the course of the study, results were given on twenty-seven children. Eaton reported that there were two treatment failures in the 5-day group and none in the 10-day group. Despite this, he felt the sample was not large enough for any weight to be attached to the findings. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada could not find evidence to indicate that either the students or the parents were consulted about the use of two different treatment approaches. The conclusion that the study did not involve a sufficient number of students to justify reaching a conclusion raises questions as to whether the research was justified in the first place."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marceau-Kozicki, S. (1993). Onion Lake Indian Residential Schools 1892-1943. Master's Thesis. University of Saskatchewan. (From an interview with Alice Carter, August 31, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 328-329; NCTR summary

<sup>3</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 264

<sup>4</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 442

<sup>5</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 438

<sup>6</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 228



Girls at Onion Lake, ca. 1928-193-, Musée Heritage Museum, Edmond Pratt/CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-344



Girls at 2nd residential school at Onion Lake, ca. 192-, Musée Héritage Museum, Edmond Pratt, OMI/CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-355



Children, one with violin, in front of 3rd residential school at Onion Lake, ca. 1928-93-, Musée Héritage Museum, Edmond Pratt/CA MHM 1995.49-is-mhm-304



Class portrait of male students, nuns, a priest and school personnel at St. Anthony's Indian Residential School, Onion Lake, Saskatchewan, ca. 1950, Library and Archives Canada/PA-202479

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"Joseph Dion, a graduate of the Onion Lake school, taught school for many years in Saskatchewan." "Dion recalled that at the Roman Catholic school in Onion Lake, he and his classmates, were not long in concluding that the lung sickness was fatal, hence as soon as we saw or heard of someone spitting blood, we immediately branded him for the grave. He had consumption: he had to die." (Vol. 1, p. 323 & iii). Photo: Joseph F. Dion, October 5, 1960, Photographer Hugh A. Dempsey, Glenbow Archives, NA-2815-1.

# RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

## Insufficient Milk

In 1926, an inspector reported that "they keep ten milch cows [dairy cows], seven of which were giving milk at the time. The Sister in charge informed me that they were poor milkers and they should have at least four more cows to provide for their requirements."<sup>7</sup>

## Fire Hazard

"A 1965 inspection of the ... school pointed out that the National Building Code required sprinklers in wood-frame buildings. However, since the principal indicated that the main building would be closed within five years, it was acceptable to install an automatic fire-alarm system."<sup>8</sup>

"In 1969, the Dominion Fire Commissioner was calling for \$55,000 worth of work to the Onion Lake school. Indian Affairs proposed that rather than making the repairs, it employ an additional night watchman at the school. The ... school did not close until 1974, almost ten years after the call for sprinkler installation. When it did close, the school was described as 'a fire hazard.'<sup>9</sup>

## Abuse

"A teenage girl from Cold Lake was

impregnated by one of the Oblate Fathers. She was apparently sent home to have her baby."<sup>10</sup>

"In 1906, Indian Commissioner David Laird instructed the Indian agent responsible for the Onion Lake school that 'ear twisting for punishment should be dropped.'<sup>11</sup>

## Language

In 1897, Principal W. Comiré reported, "The Cree language is not heard in the school, not a word is spoken among the pupils; they seem to prefer English now. The little ones even speak English to their parents, who do not understand what they say."<sup>12</sup>

"The language policy not only disrupted the long-term transmission of Aboriginal culture, but it also had an immediate and destructive impact on the bonds of family."<sup>13</sup>

"Provincial governments that recognized an obligation to Métis children began buying space for them in residential schools. Starting in 1914, Alberta began sending orphans to St. Anthony's school."<sup>14</sup>

## Arranged Marriages

In 1936, the principal made a list of students who had turned 16 who, he believed, should not be discharged because he would "try to marry them as soon as they leave the school." Of one 18-year-old girl, whom he wanted to keep until after fall threshing when she would be married to a former student, he wrote, "She will be exposed if she is turned loose." Several of these girls were orphans.<sup>15</sup>

*Onion Lake was the site of two residential schools, St. Anthony's Roman Catholic and St. Barnabas Anglican Residential Schools. Onion Lake has hosted several events centered on healing and reconciliation such as: annual health walk and reunion of all former Indian residential school students, men & women's healing circles, medicine wheel teachings, traditional parenting skills to address the intergenerational effects of Indian Residential Schools, and the building of a monument on each of the residential school sites.*



<sup>7</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 495

<sup>8</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 328

<sup>9</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 328-329

<sup>10</sup> Marceau-Kozicki, S.(1993). Onion Lake Indian Residential Schools 1892-1943. Master's Thesis, University of Saskatchewan. (from an interview with Alice Carter, August 31, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 98

<sup>12</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 622

<sup>13</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 622

<sup>14</sup> The Métis Experience, Vol. 3, p. 25

<sup>15</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 658