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A photograph of the students and staff of the Battleford Industrial School taken by D. Cadzow, undated. Saskatchewan Archives Board Photo Collection/S-B 70

In 2013, Port Perry High School students commemorated students who attended Battleford Indian Industrial School.



Battleford Indian Industrial School, the cricket team, ca. 1895, Library and Archives Canada/PA-182265

[Click here to read about Charlie \(No. 20\) from Onion Lake and the alleged ill-treatment reported by the Gazette from an interview with Indian Agent Mann. \(And other stories on supplementary page\)](#)

# BATTLEFORD INDUSTRIAL

Battleford Indian Industrial School (1883-1914) was located at Battleford, on Treaty 6 land. The school was set up in the Old Government House, which previously served as the residence of the lieutenant-governor (Edward Dewdney) when Battleford was the Territorial capital of the North-west Territories in what is now Saskatchewan. During the North-West Resistance, the school was damaged and evacuated (1885-1886). Battleford Industrial School was operated by the Anglican Church of Canada and later, in 1895, the Diocese of Saskatchewan took over operations. Rev. Thomas Clarke (who learned to speak Cree in 1877 at Sandy Lake and Snake Plains)<sup>1</sup> became the first principal. He was principal from 1883 to 1894. As one of the first three industrial schools established on the recommendations made by the Davin Report and Edgar Dewdney to Prime Minister Macdonald, the federal government covered all the costs associated with the operation of this school until it was transferred to the per capita model in 1895. In 1892, the federal government significantly reduced funding per student at its industrial schools, which at Battleford went from \$175.45<sup>2</sup> to \$140.00. In 1893, the church authorities refused to take management of the school and the federal government continued to pay the expenses until 1895, when the Diocese of Saskatchewan took over operations. Archdeacon John A. Mackay became interim principal from January to April in 1895, and Rev. Edward K. Matheson was then appointed as principal in May 1895 where he remained until the school closed in 1914.<sup>3</sup>

## Half-Time Model: Child Labour Camp

Industrial schools operated under the half-time model in which students spent half of the day receiving classroom instruction and the other half receiving farming or trades instruction. Trades included carpentry, blacksmithing, shoemaking, printing, and farming. Girls were enrolled after the North-West Resistance; Their out-of-classroom learning included housework, sewing, knitting, washing, ironing, and cooking. Survivor Mary Angus of Moosomin Reserve, who attended the school while Principal E. Matheson was in charge (1895-1914), said that after getting up at 6:00 a.m. they dressed, washed, recited prayers and ate breakfast; they then had this routine: "We did all the work, cleaning up, make the beds upstairs. Some of the girls were washing dishes in the kitchen. After that we go to work. We kept changing work every month. I used to work at the sewing room, another month I go to knitting stockings for the children on the machine, another month I go to the kitchen and another month I go to the laundry. We were changing all the time."<sup>4</sup>

## Water and Sanitation Problems

With instructions from Dewdney to exercise "the strictest economy...in all particulars," and Hayter Reed's directive, "The internal economy of the institution will be based on the military plan, and strict enforcement of the round of duties insisted upon,"<sup>5</sup> Rev. Clarke began his work. However, within a year of the opening, there were problems that resulted from the money-saving decision to locate the Battleford school in what had formerly been only a private residence. "In June 1884, Principal

Clarke reported that 'the need of having a good supply of water near the Institution is daily becoming more urgent.' The closest water supply was from the river, which was almost a kilometer away at the bottom of a steep hill.<sup>6</sup> After the school was damaged in the North-West Resistance, Dewdney believed that the most cost-efficient solution was to build a new school. However, federal government officials chose to repair the buildings instead. In 1901, Battleford was reported as still having poor water supply/unsanitary sewage.

## Language Loss

In 1887, Clarke noted that the students were making good progress with learning to read, write and speak English; however, they seemed to prefer speaking in Cree after class.<sup>7</sup>

Wasylow (1972) reported that according to survivor Sam Benson, who attended the school from 1888 to 1898, "The children were not restricted from talking in Cree to each other. Benson believed that the restrictions came into effect later, possibly after he had left."<sup>8</sup> Benson was 9 years old when he started attending the school. In 1890, Hayter Reed reported, "Discipline is not what it should be, neither is proper regard had to making the children speak English. During the whole time of my visit there appeared to be a marked lack of endeavour upon the part of the officials to see that they [the students] used English in preference to the vernacular."<sup>9</sup>

By the time survivor Mary Angus attended Battleford in 1893, there were restrictions on

<sup>1</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972). History of Battleford Industrial School for Indians. [Thesis] University of Saskatchewan, SK, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> "if converted to per capita rates, ...\$175.45." The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972). (See pages 155-159 on life of E. K. Matheson)

<sup>4</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972), p. 447

<sup>5</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972), p. 63

<sup>6</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 162

<sup>7</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972), p. 76

<sup>8</sup> Wasylow, W. J. (1972), p. 446 (interview conducted in 1969)

<sup>9</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 221

"We must never forget and we must continue to be a voice for those who had theirs taken away—we honor their spirit by what we do today." Wanda Wilson, President, SICC



This commemorative cairn bears a plaque identifying 50 of the 74 people (mostly students) buried in the Anglican cemetery connected with the Battleford Industrial School. Photo courtesy of sicc.sk archive

"In 1984, the site was designated as a Provincial Heritage Property by the province of Saskatchewan partly due to its association with Battleford Industrial School. In 2003 the structure was destroyed by fire (Parks Canada n.d.)."<sup>17</sup>

In 1975, the Saskatchewan Indian reported that "the reconsecration of the Anglican cemetery connected with the Battleford Industrial School was recently marked with a special ceremony. A cairn has been erected bearing plaques identifying the cemetery and containing the names of 50 persons known to be buried there....Seventy-four people, most of them students who attended the school, are buried in the cemetery, although records have been found for only some 50 of them."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Brace, A. (2012). *Heritage Alternatives*  
<sup>2</sup> Sept. 30, 1975, *Saskatchewan Indian*, 5(17), 6



Government House (Government of Saskatchewan, Photo by Frank Korvemaker, 1979)



Stabilized ruins of the 2003 fire. Government of Saskatchewan, Photo by Calvin Fehr, 2004

# AL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

speaking in Cree. She said, "They strapped girls too. They didn't allow us to talk Cree, and those that talked Cree and got caught talking Cree—they lose all their hair, cut up like men's cut, always straight up (up on the head). That's what they did with you—bald head like. All the hair cut to be as a man, that what they do, for us not to talk (Cree). We were afraid of that, to have our hair cut."<sup>10</sup>

## Death and ill-treatment

In 1884, a missionary on the Blood Reserve, F. Bourne, objected to sending children to schools that were so far away from home. He believed the students were dying from "sheer homesickness."<sup>11</sup> In 1886, based on an interview with Indian Agent Mann, the *Montreal Gazette* reported that parents were refusing to send their children to Battleford because of the ill-treatment of one boy. The charge was denied and a letter drawn up with an "x" for signature from Charles (No. 20), stating that he had not been treated badly by the teacher. ([Read the reports here](#))

## Unsanitary Conditions

An 1890 inspection concluded the school had no fire protection and a sanitation system that was an invitation to an epidemic. There had been no directives given to the Principal Thomas Clarke regarding admission of children with health issues, especially infectious diseases. Thus, sick children were housed with well children; students were dying at high rates from infectious diseases such as pneumonia, influenza, and tuberculosis, which were being spread throughout the school.

In 1891, "Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed concluded that the hospital ward in the school was in such poor shape that they had to move the children in it to the staff sitting room. Reed explained that, 'the noise, as well as the bad smells, come from the lavatory underneath.'"<sup>12</sup>

## Abuse

In a fall 1892 report, "Indian Affairs official Alex McGibbon wrote that another Indian Affairs official had locked a boy in a cell," against the wishes of the principal.<sup>13</sup> Also in 1892, "students were made to stand alongside a fence for two hours as punishment."<sup>14</sup>

## Decreased Enrollment and Deficit

To address low enrollments, regulations were put in place by Hayter Reed in 1895, in which power was "given ... to bring back deserters" and principals were free to exercise discretion about enforcing them. Reed added, "Schools which have not their full complement of pupils, such as Battleford and Regina, can now be filled and the Department would like you to communicate with our Agents with a view to securing orphans to fill vacancies."<sup>15</sup> However, with the Liberal victory in 1896, Reed's replacement, James Smart, backed away from this compulsory approach.<sup>16</sup> During Rev. Edward Matheson's term as principal (1895 - 1914), the number of students attending continued to decline. Enrollments of children (mostly from Montreal Lake) were especially low because the parents were unwilling to send their children away from

home for an education.<sup>17</sup> In 1899, Matheson criticized the government for not enforcing the attendance regulations: "The policy of the department—that of insisting on the education of the children—is the proper one. But one thing remains, and that is to put *the policy into force*. Until this is done the full results desired cannot be shown."<sup>18</sup> Lower attendance resulted in a lower per capita grant, leading to a deficit of over \$2,000 by the end of 1911. This pattern continued into 1912 when enrollment dropped to 35. [Duncan Campbell Scott](#), Indian Affairs superintendent of Indian Education, concluded that "the school had outlived its usefulness,"<sup>19</sup> recommending its closure.

"When the Battleford school closed in May 1914, Principal Matheson reminded Indian Affairs of the school cemetery that contained the bodies of 70-80 individuals, most of whom were former students. He worried that unless the government took steps to care for the cemetery, it would be overrun by stray cattle."<sup>20</sup> In 1975, the Battleford school cemetery was re-consecrated. A cairn was erected bearing the names of 50 (mostly students) known persons to be buried there.<sup>21</sup>

[Read more about Battleford IRS](#)

<sup>12</sup> Canada's Residential Schools: The Legacy, Vol. 5, p. 143

<sup>13</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 97

<sup>14</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 99

<sup>15</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 256

<sup>16</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 258

<sup>17</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 268

<sup>18</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939 Vol. 1, p. 259

<sup>19</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 268

<sup>20</sup> Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 119

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/archive/saskindian/a75sep3006.htm>