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Photo: St. Michael's Indian Residential School at Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, ca. 1935, Les Oeuvres Oblates de l'Ontario (Archive Deschâtelets). In 1937, Dr. Ferguson noted, "It is only fair to tell you that one of the worst conditions [is] maintain[ed] at the Duck Lake school near Prince Albert in [Prime Minister] Mr. King's own constituency." This was in response to the Director of Indian Affairs Dr. H. W. McGill's direction to "drastically reduce medical care. Agents were ordered to remove from hospitals all Native people with chronic conditions, and ...hospital care was to be restricted to those who absolutely needed it, ...there was to be a 'drastic reduction' in the use of drugs for Native people." (Maureen Lux, 1998)



From Mission to Partnership Collection, "Indian boys of the Duck Lake Boarding School working on the new addition," ca. 1900s. United Church of Canada - Digital Collections 93.049 P2021 N



Sewing room at Duck Lake, ca. Sept. 1934, Glenbow Archives/NA-4938-40

# ST. MICHAEL'S INDIAN

The St. Michael's (Duck Lake) Indian Industrial Residential School opened in 1894 and closed in 1996. It was operated by the Roman Catholic Church (Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, and Oblate Indian-Eskimo Council) until 1982 when the Duck Lake residence came under the control of the Saskatoon District Chiefs.<sup>1</sup> The school was located a half a mile (.8 kms) from the Town of Duck Lake, facing the lake (Treaty 6).

In 1895, members of the Arrow Band were induced to place their children in the Duck Lake Boarding school by the Indian Agent R. S. McKenzie. Because the parents refused to send their children, McKenzie reported that he told them, "if they would not let them go willingly in all probability the Department would take them by force and send them to whatever school was thought best." Consequently, when the Government was paying treaty, the parents offered their children to the Agent, who in fact couldn't take them because the school had a full complement of pupils.<sup>2</sup>

## Student Deaths

In 1898, Gabriel Poundmaker, the son of Chief Poundmaker died of tuberculosis. "This boy was a general favourite in the school, being of a gentle and amiable disposition. He

<sup>1</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 97

<sup>2</sup> Indian Affairs RG 10, Vol. 6035, file 652-1, part 1. Letter from Agent McKenzie to Indian Commissioner, Regina

was particularly kind to the small boys, who often went to him for comfort in their childish troubles. Though never strong, nor possessed of much talent, he showed great taste for music, and his cornet-playing was admired by all who heard him."<sup>3</sup>

In 1910, Indian agent J. MacArthur reported "that the death rate at the Duck Lake school was returning to its 'high mark.' Two students had died and two others were dying." He estimated that 50% of the children sent to the school had died. MacArthur understood that children were getting sick at the school, rather than home as some believed, pointing out that children "spent only one month a year at home. During that month, they spent 'their time on the open prairie and sleep in tents.' The rest of the year, they were in the school. 'No one responsible can get beyond the sad fact that those children catch the disease while at school.'"<sup>4</sup>

## Illness

After diphtheria broke out in 1909, all the students at the school were vaccinated and "the nine students who became ill were placed in a 'large isolated house.'"<sup>5</sup>

In 1966 and 1967 there were outbreaks of hepatitis. In 1989, "an outbreak of salmonella (bacteria-based food poisoning)... affected

<sup>3</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 394

<sup>4</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 418

<sup>5</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 443

44 people" with 24 hospitalized. "An investigation into the residence kitchen concluded that the outbreak was likely the result of a combination of poor food handling, a lack of dependable equipment (the refrigerators did not keep food cool enough), and understaffing (untrained staff often pressed served in the kitchen)."<sup>6</sup>

## Fire

Several fires were deliberately set in 1917. "One of the students who attempted to burn down the Duck Lake school in 1917 was sent to a reformatory school."<sup>7</sup> In 1926, fire destroyed the former school building.

In April 1948, a provincial inspector reported that the "school lacked sufficient fire escapes." Funds were not provided for new escapes until June 1949.<sup>8</sup>

## Running Away

On October 31, 1967, three girls ran away from school. "Two of them were quickly found," but the third, who had not been found a week later, was suspended from school even though her location was still unknown.<sup>9</sup> The other two girls stated the reason for leaving was that "they were being mistreated by some other students."<sup>10</sup> On November 29, 1968, a boy had run away ...

<sup>6</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 209

<sup>7</sup> The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 486

<sup>8</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 313

<sup>9</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 364

<sup>10</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 456



St. Michael's Residential School former student Deanna Ledoux talks about recognizing and dealing with residential school trauma in the classroom. Think Indigenous Education Conference, Indian Teacher Education Program.



Eugene Arcand speaks of his experiences at St. Michael's Indian Residential School



Fred Sasakamoose speaks of his experiences at St. Michael's Indian Residential School and as a hockey player in the NHL



Roy Sanderson, former student of St. Michael's residential school, reflects on the TRC. June 2015, Jason Kerr/Prince Albert Daily Herald.



Nazaire Azarie Bird tells of his experiences at St. Michael's Indian Residential School and Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School. Where are the Children exhibit. Legacy of Hope

"Depart pour Mistawasis," June 1947, Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

Former student stories

# RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

and by December 4, he had not returned" to the school. "Although he was listed on the December 1968 quarterly return, he was omitted from the March 1969 return."<sup>11</sup>

In 1973, a parent was informed "that his daughter had run away once more." The school official explained that "he suspected the girl was 'having difficulty in having the other girls accept her.' She was subsequently located and brought back ... but it was recommended that ... she be allowed to return to her home community" because of her loneliness at the school.<sup>12</sup>

Former student and hockey legend, Fred Sasakamoose of Ahtahkakoop First Nation, "remembers escaping from the residential school with his friend, Charlie." On their way home, a roadblock at the North Saskatchewan River caused them to head downstream. "A ferry operator alerted the residential school's officials as to their whereabouts" and the school administration found them. Sasakamoose said, "They stopped us just outside of Duck Lake - the town." The school officials said, "give us your shoes and socks. Now, walk to the school in bare feet." By that time, "their feet were already blistered from the long walk." Sasakamoose remembers "his feet bleeding by the time they got to the school." As further punishment, "they were whipped and had coal oil poured on

their heads, burning their eyes." "I want my childhood back that I didn't have in the residential school," Sasakamoose said through his tears.<sup>13</sup>

## Sexual Abuse

A former staff member who worked as a chaplain, child care worker and guidance counsellor at St. Michael's from September 1973 to approximately 1992, was convicted of committing acts of gross indecency between September 1986 and December 1987.<sup>14</sup> In 1993, "a female student reported that she had been sexually abused" since the age of 5. She also stated that she had slept with two male students.<sup>15</sup>

## Hockey Successes

In 1946, the Duck Lake school hockey team, called the "St. Michael's Indians," (known as the "Ducks") "won the championship of an eight-team league ... In 1948, the same team ... won the northern Saskatchewan midget hockey championship. The following year, it won the provincial championship. According to the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, "While the Duck Lake boys were outweighed in their midget series they made it up in hockey know-how, skating ability and shooting accuracy. Their drives, from any angle, had the Regina players scared and baffled at the same time."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pa Herald.sk.ca/Local/News/2012-02-03/article-2885301/Aboriginal-spirit-proves-unbreakable/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.theinquiry.ca/wordpress/accused/charged/doucette-gilles/>

<sup>15</sup> NCTR school summary, p. 11

<sup>16</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 470

Fred Sasakamoose was one of the Duck Lake hockey team in 1949. He became the "first status Indian to play in the National Hockey League." Sasakamoose explained that "the priests who ran the school were from Québec and loved hockey. During the winters, the boys had the opportunity to skate every day." But the athletes experienced the same sort of discipline in sports as they did in every other aspect of school life. Sasakamoose said, "The priests never talked twice. The second time, you got the strap. But Father Roussell had a dream. He told me, 'Freddie, I'm going to work you hard, but if you work hard, you're going to be successful.'"<sup>17</sup> Though Sasakamoose was the star player on a championship team, he had also been abused at school. At 15 years of age he decided to leave school and go home. Sasakamoose recalls, "My gosh, I felt good. I felt that the world had changed, had opened a gate for me..." Later, "when a priest brought a hockey scout to his family's home, Sasakamoose hid," because he thought he was going to be taken back to school. He was finally persuaded to play junior hockey in Moose Jaw, and though he was a good player, he never felt that he fit into the world of professional sports; all he wanted was to be home with his parents.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Survivors Speak, p. 193

<sup>18</sup> Survivors Speak, p. 193

<sup>11</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 365

<sup>12</sup> The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 456