

[Back to Overview](#)



Marieval Cowessess Indian Residential School in Elcapo Creek Valley, Saskatchewan, n.d./ St. Boniface Historical Society Archives, 0001/SHSB 1461

Sides differ over preservation of residential school

Tekawennake News (Ohsweken, Ontario), 21 Jul 1999



Indigenous boys of the Indian School of Marieval identified without any order: Louis Agecontay, Frank Lerat, Isidore Smoker, Fred Acoose, Marvin Rainville, W. John Delorme, Solomon Still, Louis Swarvier, Willie Adams, Clifford Lerat, Vincent Delorme, George Red, George Delorme, Laurence Sparvier, Ernest Lavallée, Alexandre Tanner, Francis Kay, Louis Lavallée, Ernest Still, Edward Pelletier, Lermard Tanner, Robert Redwood, Noel Acoose et Pierre Lavallée, ca 1934, St. Boniface Historical Society, Oblats de Marie-Immaculée Province oblate du Manitoba/ SHSB-28847



Photograph of an unidentified Oblate and a nun with her class of Aboriginal students in Marieval, ca. 194-, St. Boniface Historical Society, Oblats de Marie-Immaculée du Manitoba/ SHSB 24652



Marieval Indian Residential School with classroom block, St. Boniface Historical Society Archives, 0001/ SHSB 1466

MARIEVAL (COWESSESS) IN

The Marieval (Cowessess, Grayson) Indian Residential School, which operated from 1899 to 1997, was located 24 kms north of Broadview, east of Crooked Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley on what became part of the Cowessess First Nation Reserve in 1981 (Treaty 4). The Roman Catholic Church operated the school, first by four Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions de Lyon and from 1901 - 1979 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Hyacinthe.¹ Previously, a day school had existed at Crooked Lake from 1886 - 1888, but it closed and Catholic students were transported to Qu'Appelle school until the boarding school opened in 1899. The Federal Government purchased the property for \$70, 000 in January 1926.² "In 1949, citing their rights under Treaty 4, the parents at the Cowessess Reserve petitioned the government for a non-sectarian day school. 'We ask for a higher standard of education so as our children will grow up in the spirit of self reliance.'"³ This petition was dismissed, at that time. The Government assumed responsibility for the residential school in 1968 and in 1970 proposed the closure of the residences. This proposal was protested by David Ahenakew because it was

"not the wish of the Indian people affected." The residence's existence continued to be precarious and there were arguments made for its existence into 1978.⁴ The Cowessess Band took over operations in 1981. The school closed in 1997 and was controversially demolished in 1999 and finally (50 years after the petition) replaced with a day school. "The church, rectory, and cemetery remain."⁵

Payment for Pupils

"Indian Commissioner David Laird reported in 1902 that the Indian agent for the Cowessess Reserve believed 'it has been a rule with the Roman Catholic Schools to be generous to the parents of pupils they may get.' Laird added, 'This 'generous' practice is not confined to R. C. Schools, and I have had occasion within the last year to censure what appeared more like a payment for pupils than mere generosity.'"⁶

From Excellence to Substandard Education

In a 1925 inspection report, when Principal Carriere was in charge, Inspector Murison reported that the children had large portions of meat and buttered bread left over after

a meal. All but four of the 88 children were present and "very neatly clothed," and had "a well nourished appearance." "There is plenty of good wholesome food provided including all the milk the children desire."⁷ Indian Commissioner Graham responded: "The report on the Cowesses school is encouraging and shows ... the children are getting a proper training."⁸ A 1929 inspection also indicated the "everything ... is in first class shape and good work is being done."⁹ However, Agent Ostrander wrote to criticize the discipline in the boys classroom and to recommend that the sister who was teaching the class be replaced. A 1932 inspection suggested a substandard education at the school: "The teaching as I saw it today was merely a question of memorizing and repeating a mass of, to the children, 'meaningless' facts."¹⁰

Physical Domination of Students

"Indian agent J. P. B. Ostrander refused to transfer a boy from the Cowessess school to another school in 1919 for fear that 'the other boys may form the opinion that the Brother [in charge of discipline at Cowessess] is afraid

¹Archdiocese of Regina: A History (1988)

²Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Dept of Justice to Myall to Chief Accountant Paget, January 7, 1926

³The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 145

⁴February (1978). Marieval Student Residence is Serving a Tremendous Need. *Saskatchewan Indian 8*(2)

⁵Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, Vol. 4, p. 129

⁶The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 283

⁷ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Inspection Report Murison to Graham, 1925

⁸ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Commissioner Graham to Department, July 1925

⁹ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Letter from Commissioner Graham, Sept. 25, 1929

¹⁰ The Legacy, Vol. 5, p. 63



Rectory of the Sacred Heart of Mary Parish (Elcapo RM 154, Saskatchewan Government of Saskatchewan, Dwayne Yasinowski). The building was constructed in 1897 in conjunction with an adjoining Cowessess Residential School. In 1968 the Department of Indian Affairs took control of the Residential School. The Oblate Brothers remained administrators of the school until 1971. Now a private residence, the Sacred Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Rectory remains on its original location beside the Sacred Heart of Mary Roman Catholic Church and is one of the oldest structures in the community. From Canada's Historic Places <http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=4959>

Click to read former student stories

Carol Lavallee: "When they came and took me to residential school at six years old they came and got us in a cattle truck...I remember I was so small that I couldn't see over the box. My sister was standing right tight against me to hold me still so I wouldn't be bounced around in the back of this cattle truck."

Although that was the only time she and her siblings were transported by cattle truck to the Marieval Residential school, it's a memory that has stuck with her. It was in the back of that cattle truck she was taken from a loving and safe home to face years of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. (Kerry Benjoe, LeaderPost, Sept. 21, 2007)



All Saints Catholic School in Kanata, Ontario participated in Project of Heart to commemorate the lives of those children who died at three residential schools in Saskatchewan: Muscowequan IRS, Marieval IRS, and St. Michael's IRS, all run by the Catholic Church.



Students from the Marieval IRS, ca. 1934, Oblats de Mary Immaculate of Manitoba/SHSB28846

Wendy McNab shares intergenerational effects of residential schools. Her mother went to residential school at Lebret and Marieval.

DIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

of the big boys.' Ostrander's letter made it clear that staff were expected to physically dominate students. He wrote, approvingly, 'Of course when he is strict there will be a big boy occasionally who will try him to see how far he can go, but so far the boys have found that the Brother is their master and I think it does them good.'¹¹

Parental Visits

Until the death of Principal Carriere in 1933, it had been the custom of the school "for Indian parents of children attending ... to visit the school at any time but the more especially on Sunday and take their children from the school to their homes or camps and eat a meal with them, sometimes staying with them several hours." Fr. Chatelain, the new Acting Principal wanted the practice to end. "He wished to make a rule that the children would not be permitted to visit in their own homes in the future during the regular school term except under special circumstances." The parents went to discuss the matter with Agent Ostrander, who explained to the parents why he considered the principal "quite correct."¹² Secretary A. F. MacKenzie responded with "the children must not visit

their home during the regular term without special permission. Parents may visit the school to see their children as arranged by the Reverend Principal."¹³ One year later, Principal Chatelain, wrote to the Department, that "after experiencing the new regulation...I am believing that ... it would be better to let the children go home, not every Sunday, but on the first Sunday of each month."¹⁴ Principal Chatelain was told to discuss the matter with Indian Agent Ostrander who would make a recommendation.¹⁵

Running Away

"In October 1940, the Mounted Police located and returned a boy who had run away from the ... school."¹⁶ When two 13-year-old girls ran away for a second time in October 1944, the principal called the RCMP who "located them at the home of the father of one of the girls and returned them to the school. According to the officer, 'they were warned about their conduct and promised not to cause any more trouble.'¹⁷ In 1945, a female student attempted to leave the school to meet with local boys. "As punishment, her hair was cut. Angered by

¹³ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. MacKenzie to Ostrander, Sept. 7, 1933

¹⁴ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Chatelain, O.M.I., to MacKenzie, July 16, 1934.

¹⁵ Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. MacKenzie to Principal Chatelain, July 23, 1934 (This researcher could not discover any further correspondence on the matter)

¹⁶ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 339

¹⁷ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 340

this treatment, the girl's parents came to the school and withdrew her and her two sisters. An altercation developed between the mother and one of the supervisors. Charges were brought against both parents. The mother was convicted of common assault and fined \$1 plus \$4.50 in costs. The father was convicted under the *Indian Act* provisions regarding truancy, and fined \$1 plus \$4.75 in court costs. Because the girl's hair was not closely cropped but simply left in the 'usual school girl bob,' the Indian Affairs official investigating the matter felt the parents had been unreasonable. He recommended that if the girl 'does not behave in future she be sent to a Reform School.'¹⁸

Fire Hazard

Dr. J. J. Wall reported in 1938 the fire hazard he perceived at the school: The "iced poles of iron, narrow snow or ice filled metal stairs on the outside possibly open to a wall of flames from some window it passes will only add to the panic at night."¹⁹ Despite 1932, 1938, and 1942 circulars instructing that fire exits be kept unlocked, a 1952 fire inspection reported that the fire-escape doors to the boys' and girls' dormitories were locked, further, in the boys dorm, a part of the latch was missing.²⁰

¹⁸ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 374

¹⁹ The History, Part 1: Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 480

²⁰ The History, Part 2: 1939 to 2000, Vol. 1, p. 319, Vol. 4, p. 80

¹¹ The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939, Vol. 1, p. 529

¹² Indian Affairs, RG10, Vol 6303, file 651-1, part 1. Ostrander to the Indian Affairs, Aug. 21, 1933.