

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA ARCHIVES

BRIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS & THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA'S HEALING AND RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

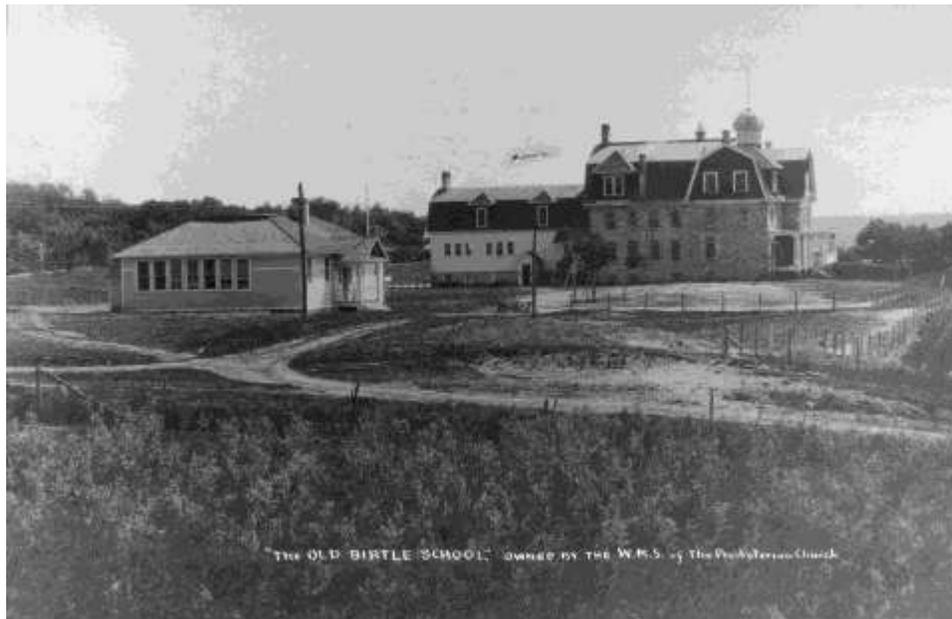


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BRIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's involvement in the residential school system for aboriginal people spanned almost nine decades from the mid-1880s until 1969 when the residential schools became the full responsibility of the Federal Government. In total, the church operated eleven residential schools. However, at the time of Church Union in 1925, responsibility for the majority of these schools was transferred to the newly formed United Church of Canada. Only two schools – Birtle School in Manitoba and Cecilia Jeffrey School in Kenora, Ontario - remained the responsibility of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC).



The PCC first began its mission work with aboriginal people in Canada in the mid-1860s. One prominent aspect of this outreach right from the start was education - especially of children - and day schools were established on a number of reserves. By the early 1880s, however, the Federal Government became

focused on a system of off-reserve, residential (ie. “boarding”) schools for the education of aboriginal children, rather than the further development of day schools.¹ The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed and began partnering with the government in the establishment and operation of new schools. Generally speaking, the Church was responsible for operating the schools while the government provided funding and oversight, and established the policies under which the schools were to be administered.

Administratively, it was the Foreign Missions Committee of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, under the authority of the Church's highest court - the General Assembly – which assumed responsibility over the operation of the schools. The Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Western Division), assisted this



G-1974-FC Cecilia Jeffrey School, 1964

committee by raising funds and promoting the work amongst its members. Over time this relationship changed, however, and the Women's Missionary Society (W.M.S.) assumed a greater role in the administration of the schools. This shift was completed in 1927 when the General Board of Missions of The Presbyterian Church in Canada agreed that “management of all Indian Boarding Schools be under the care and supervision of the W.M.S. (Western Division).”² The W.M.S. (W.D.) continued in this capacity until 1969 when the schools became the full responsibility of the Federal Government.

The residential schools were financed largely through a per capita grant given to the WMS by the government, ie. a certain amount was provided for each student at the school. This grant was to cover items such as food, clothing, school and building supplies,

¹ J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pages 100-105.

² The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives, General Board of Missions - Minutes, March 1927, File #1988-1003-3-3.

salaries (except the Principal and Matron), and general maintenance needs. The buildings themselves were owned by the government and any capital improvements or expenditures rested with them. The WMS, in turn, paid the Principal and Matron's salaries, as well as any additional spending required to meet the operational needs of the school. Budgeting within the per capita limits proved difficult and was a constant and ongoing concern to the Principal and the WMS. Beginning in 1957, the government assumed a greater role in the financing of the schools and the per capita grant system was replaced with one in which the schools were reimbursed for actual expenditures based on budgeted allocations.³

The day-to-day administration of the schools largely rested with the Principal, who was appointed by, and reported to, the W.M.S. (W.D.). As head of the school, the Principal was responsible for a wide-variety of functions including hiring and managing staff, overseeing the students, ensuring the maintenance of the building and property (including the farm), managing the school's daily finances, and maintaining discipline.

Other staff at the schools generally included the teachers, the Matron (who was often the wife of the Principal), Boys' and Girls' Supervisors, Cook, Laundry Matron, Sewing Matron, Nurse, Engineer, Farm Manager, and a Night Watchman. The staff were generally hired by the Principal in consultation with the WMS, and their salaries were paid for out of the per capita grant received from the government. This changed slightly in September 1954 when the Department of Indian Affairs took over direct responsibility for the hiring and paying of the teachers in the schools⁴.



G-4451-FC-12 Cecilia Jeffrey students working on the farm, c.1937

The curriculum in the schools also changed over time. The schools taught Grades 1 to 8. However, up until the mid-1940s the students were on a "half-day" system. This meant that half their time was spent in classroom learning while the other half was spent in vocational training. For boys this primarily meant work on the school farm, although other manual training was involved as well. For girls it usually involved training in sewing, dress-making and cooking. This "half-day" system also meant that it took longer for students in a residential school to complete the academic curriculum. By the late-1940s the students at both Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey were on a full-day system of classroom learning, which was to follow the standard curriculum of the province in which the school was located⁵.

"This year the children went to classes for the whole day, as in other schools. This has given them a much greater opportunity, as a child can complete the work of a grade in a year. The prospects for the future are much better. A goodly number in the Junior classroom will be doing high school work before they are sixteen under the present system. The children's English is improving, so that their Indian language is seldom heard in the playground or around the building. Most of the Indians praise the full-day system, and some see the advantage of entering school early, but some still do not and will not bring their children to school before ten or eleven years of age".

[Report of the Principal of Birtle School, WMS Annual Report 1945, page 52]

³ John Milloy, *A National Crime* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999) page 270, and also Millar 393.

⁴ A good source of information on staff positions is the 1952-53 report of Rev. J.C.E. Andrews, Principal of Cecilia Jeffrey School (Women's Missionary Society. Cecilia Jeffrey School – General Files, File #1988-7004-18-14)

⁵ According to the W.M.S. Annual Reports the switch to "full-day" schooling was begun at both Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey in 1943, with the youngest grades, and was phased in over the next few years.

Students that completed Grade 8 could write an entrance examination in order to attend high school classes in the nearest town (Birtle or Kenora). Up until the late 1940s and the introduction of the full-day system, the percentage of students entering high school remained extremely small. In 1949, 300 students attended Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey, while only 17 of these were in High School.⁶

Christian education was also an important aspect of the daily curriculum at both Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey, although the number of daily or weekly worship services held, and the form of religious training, varied slightly over the years, and between the two schools. Scripture readings and exercises were usually conducted each morning, while chapel services were often held in the evening. Worship services were held once or twice each Sunday, and a Sunday School was often conducted in the afternoon. Church-related groups such as Mission Bands, Explorers, and C.G.I.T. meetings were also encouraged.

During the 1950s, the demographics of the student populations at both Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey began to change. Following the revision of the Indian Act in 1951, more and more day schools began to be opened on nearby reserves, which saw fewer local children being sent to the residential schools. As a result, a larger percentage of the students at Birtle and Cecilia Jeffrey were from more distant and remote areas that had no day school of their own⁷. At the same time, the percentage of high school students living at the schools also increased considerably. Beginning in 1951, aboriginal students from across Manitoba and Saskatchewan that were eligible for high school but otherwise had no access to one were brought to live at Birtle, where they could attend classes in the local high school.



G-6-SB-16 High School Students, Birtle School, May 1952

“The students are from almost all Protestant reserves in Manitoba and from several in Saskatchewan. A number of them are members of other churches. This is due to the fact that the day schools on the reserves are caring for the younger students and those who are able to attend from their homes. To residential school go those children, who are too distant to attend day school, orphans, those from broken or very bad homes and those who are seeking grades above the day school.”

[Report of the Principal of Birtle, WMS Annual Report 1958]

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Residential School system entered a final transition stage as the Federal Government shifted its policy away from segregated residential schools and towards the education of aboriginal students in local public systems. This shift began at Cecilia Jeffrey in 1959 and by 1965 all students living at the school were attending classes in the local public school.⁸ Integration of students in Grades 1 to 8 began at Birtle School in 1962 and was more or less complete by 1966. In 1967, Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School was formally renamed Cecilia Jeffrey Residence.

⁶ W.M.S. Annual Report 1949, page 44 (File #1988-7004-2-6)

⁷ WMS Annual Report 1956, page 47 (File #1988-7004-2-9)

⁸ WMS Annual report 1965, page 76 (File #1988-7004-3-3)

On March 31, 1969, The Presbyterian Church in Canada's involvement in the operation of the schools ended, and Birtle Residential School and Cecilia Jeffrey Residence were transferred to the Federal Government.

BRIEF ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF HEALING AND RECONCILIATION EFFORTS

By the mid-1980s a greater recognition was awakening within The Presbyterian Church in Canada of its part in the painful legacy of church, government and First Nations relations - including its involvement in the Residential Schools - and steps began to be taken to “hear and respond” more sensitively to the agendas of First Nations people.⁹

In 1989 a National Committee on Native Ministry was established. Shortly thereafter, the Church joined the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (renamed the Indigenous Rights Program of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative), and in 1993 a Residential Schools Working Group was formed. Draft work on an apology to Aboriginal peoples was also begun in early 1991, culminating in the 1994 adoption of the Church’s “Confession” by the 120th General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This confession was formally presented at the Forks National Site in Winnipeg on October 8th, 1994. Phil Fontaine, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, received the confession on behalf of First Nations people.¹⁰

Since then, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has embarked on a number of initiatives with the goal of greater healing and reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples.

In 1995, The Rev. Dr. Allan McPherson and eighteen other members of the Church, attended the “Sacred Assembly”, a four day event called by Elijah Harper to “bring together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spiritual leaders for the purpose of providing counsel and promoting reconciliation”.¹¹

In 1996 work began on a healing fund initiative which resulted in the launching of the “Journey to Wholeness” campaign in April 1998. A “Journey to Wholeness Campaign Committee” guided the initiative, which lasted until March 31, 2000 and raised more than \$280,000 for a variety of healing-related projects.¹²

On the legal side, the first claim relating to residential schools was filed against The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1998. By 2003 there were a total of 246 claims¹³. On February 13, 2003, a settlement agreement was signed by The Rev. Stephen Kendall, Principal Clerk, on behalf of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, with the Federal Government. This agreement outlined the “relative financial burden each will bear in trying to repair harm done to students at residential schools administered by The



G-3664-FC-16 Rev. George Vais presenting the Church's "Confession" to Phil Fontaine, Winnipeg, October 1994.

⁹ *Acts and Proceedings of the 115th General Assembly (1989)*, pg. 468. The words “hear and respond” were used in the Board of World Mission’s response to Overture No. 6, 1987 from the Synod of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario to describe the mandate of the newly formed National Committee on Native Ministry: “This Committee, by its mandate, would be in a better place and interest to hear and respond sensitively to the agendas of our Native brothers and sisters.”

¹⁰ *Acts and Proceedings of the 120th General Assembly (1994)*. See page 376 for the text of the “Confession” as presented to, and adopted by, the General Assembly.

¹¹ *Acts & Proceedings of the 122nd General Assembly (1996)*, pg. 214.

¹² *Presbyterian Record*, Feb. 2007, pg. 20.

¹³ *Presbyterian Record*, Feb. 2007, pg. 21.

Presbyterian Church in Canada.”¹⁴ Under this agreement, the Church’s share was \$2,100,000 and this was set aside in a “Residential Schools Settlement Fund”.¹⁵ At the same time, two additional funds were created: the “Residential Schools Resolution Fund” (\$500,000), sometimes called the Implementation Fund, designed to provide the resources needed to ensure the Church meets its commitments under the agreement; and the “Residential Schools Healing and Reconciliation Fund” (\$500,000) designed to complement the Journey to Wholeness Fund, and allow the church to “initiate and participate in education, and healing and reconciliation initiatives and programs.”¹⁶

In 2004 the Residential Schools Working Group was replaced with a one-year Healing and Reconciliation Task Force, designed to establish a “national strategy for engaging congregations in the healing process with aboriginals”.¹⁷ This work resulted in the formation of a Healing and Reconciliation Design Team in 2005.

In 2006, the General Assembly approved the work of the Design Team and established the “Walking Together” program, to be administered through the Justice Ministries department of the Life and Mission Agency. This program has five goals: to provide support and/or seed funding for local initiatives; to encourage and support activities for youth; to invite other denominations to engage in a Leaders tour or initiative, with reference to the model of Ten Days for Global Justice; to develop and distribute resource materials; and to establish and support a local resource team to further healing and reconciliation in the years to come.¹⁸

To assist with the implementation of the program, a Healing and Reconciliation Animator was hired in September 2006, and a Healing and Reconciliation Advisory Committee was formed in December 2006. One of the primary responsibilities of this committee is to provide funding for various projects through the newly formed “Native Ministries Healing and Reconciliation Fund” (see footnote 15) and “Healing and Reconciliation Project Fund”.

In 2007, the “Residential Schools Settlement Agreement” between the Government of Canada, the churches, and representatives of former students, came into effect. This agreement provided a system of compensation for former students of the residential schools, and also led to the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Under this agreement, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has also agreed to provide copies of all documentation relating to its involvement in the residential schools system in the hopes that they will assist the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to “learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians.”¹⁹

¹⁴ *Acts & Proceedings of the 112th General Assembly (2003)*, pg. 201.

¹⁵ As a result of a new Residential Schools agreement signed in 2006, this amount of \$2,100,000 set aside for the “Residential Schools Settlement Fund” was reduced to \$1,320,000 in August 2007. The 2006 General Assembly approved that the difference between the two amounts be used toward healing and reconciliation work. Out of this money, \$200,000 was designated for participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; \$400,000 was set aside and became the “Native Ministries Healing Fund”; \$100,000 was used for the Healing and Reconciliation Program of Justice Ministries; and \$84,000 was used for the Aboriginal and Church Leaders’ Tour “Remembering the Children”. For further information see the *Acts & Proceedings of the 134th General Assembly (2008)*, page 211.

¹⁶ *Acts & Proceedings of the 129th General Assembly (2003)*, pgs. 210, 222-229.

¹⁷ *Presbyterian Record*, Feb. 2007, pg. 23.

¹⁸ *Acts and Proceedings of the 133rd General Assembly (2007)*, page 323.

¹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Website www.trc.ca

LIST OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS OPERATED BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA²⁰

Ahousaht Residential School, British Columbia

A day school was opened in 1896. In 1902 it started taking on boarders and in 1903 it was accepted as a residential school by the Federal Government. It became the responsibility of the United Church of Canada after 1925.

Alberni Residential School, British Columbia

A day school was opened in 1890. It became a boarding/industrial school in December 1892. It became the responsibility of the United Church of Canada after 1925.

Birtle Residential School, Manitoba

Birtle Residential School began as a day school in 1884 and was converted to a boarding or “residential” school in December 1888. Following Church Union in 1925, responsibility for the school remained uncertain until 1927 when the Dominion Property Commission assigned it to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The following served as Principals of Birtle School after Church Union: Mr. H.B. Currie (1927-1929); Rev. E.H. Lockhart (1929-1942); Mr. A.E. Candy (acting Principal 1942); Mr. Roy Webb (1942-1945); and Mr. N.M. Rusaw (1945-1969). Mr. Rusaw’s title was changed from Principal to Administrator in 1968. Responsibility for the school was transferred to the Federal Government in 1969.

Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School, Kenora, Ontario

Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School was built in the summer and fall of 1901, and was opened in January 1902. It was located on Shoal Lake, 45 miles from Kenora. Following Church Union in 1925, responsibility for the school remained uncertain until 1927 when the Dominion Property Commission assigned it to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. A new building, located 3 mile from Kenora, was formally opened and dedicated on November 6th, 1929. The following served as Principals of the Cecilia Jeffrey School after Church Union: Rev. A.D. Menzies (1927-1929); Mr. E.W. Byers (1929-1940); Mr. Douglas Pitts (1940-1948); Mr. T.C. Ross (1948-1951); Mr. R.S. MacCallum (1951-1952); Rev. J.C. E. Andrews (1952-1953); Mr. Eric Barrington (acting Principal 1953-1954); Mr. Ivan Robson (1954-1957); Mr. Howard Neely (1957-1958); Mr. Stephen Robinson (1958-1966); and Mr. Colin Wasacase (1966-1969). Mr. Wasacase’s title changed from Principal to Administrator in 1967. Responsibility for the school was transferred to the Federal Government in 1969.

Crowstand Residential School, Saskatchewan

This school was opened on Jan. 28th, 1889. A new building was erected in 1899. It closed on November 30th, 1915 and a new day school called Cote Indian School was opened in its place in December 1916.

File Hills Residential School, Saskatchewan

An industrial/boarding school was opened c.1888. A new school building was opened in 1910. It became the responsibility of the United Church of Canada after 1925.

²⁰ This listing was compiled from information taken from the W.F.M.S. and W.M.S. Annual Reports 1888-1927.

Muscowpetung (later known as “Lakesend”) Residential School, Saskatchewan

A boarding school opened c.1888. In 1890 the school was moved to a point nine miles north of the old site. This school closed in June 1894 but was re-opened briefly in 1895 before being closed again in 1896.

Portage la Prairie Residential School, Manitoba

This school opened c.1886 by the women of Knox Presbyterian Church, Portage la Prairie, who formed a group called the “Women’s Sioux Missionary Society”. This society was incorporated into the W.F.M.S. (W.D.) in 1887. A new residence was opened in 1895. It became the responsibility of the United Church of Canada after 1925.

Regina Industrial School, Saskatchewan

This school was opened in 1891 as a Government Industrial School. The school was supported entirely by the per capita grant given by the Indian Department. Additional financial aid was not provided by the W.F.M.S. (W.D.). It was closed in 1910.

Round Lake Residential School, Saskatchewan

A school was opened at this mission in December 1884. In December 1887 a new “boarding” school was opened. It became the responsibility of the United Church of Canada after 1925.

Stoney Plain Residential School, Alberta

A boarding/industrial school was opened c.1889-90. This school was closed in 1893 and the mission was transferred to the Methodist Church in 1894.