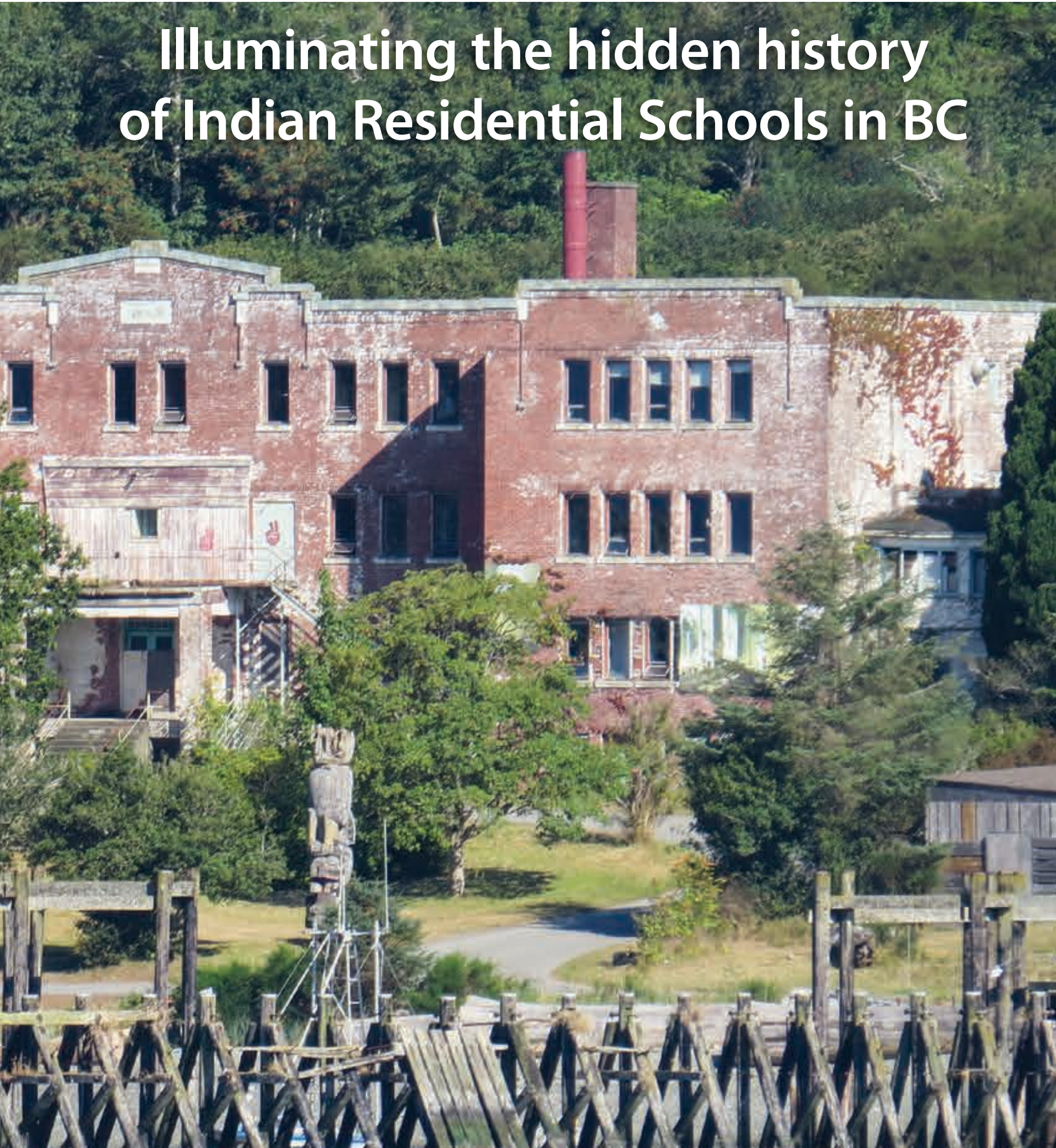


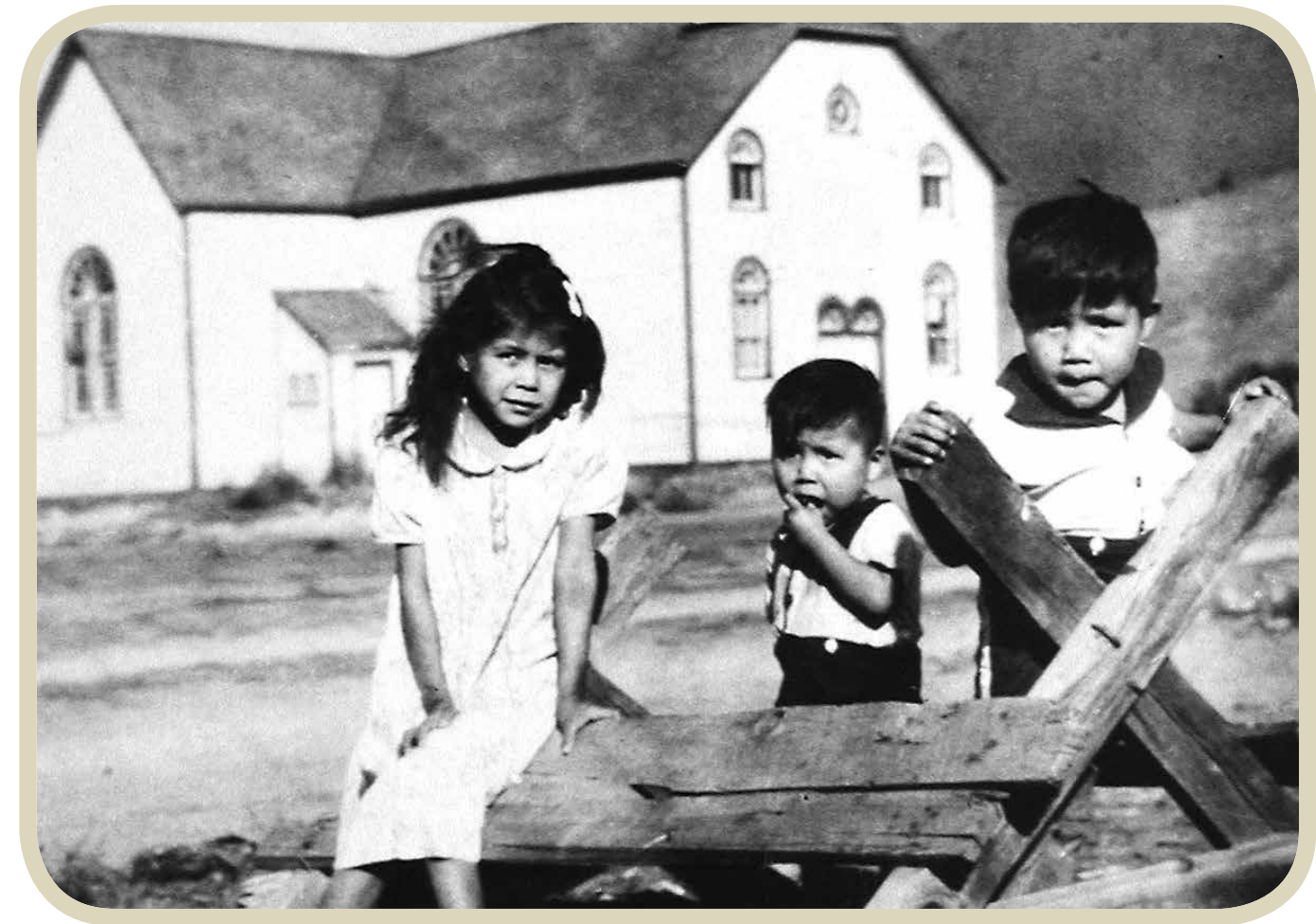
Project of Heart

Illuminating the hidden history
of Indian Residential Schools in BC



Project of Heart

Illuminating the hidden history of
Indian Residential Schools in BC



Janice@fallenfeatherproductions.com / FallenFeather-Secwemepc Museum & Archives KIB

Dedication

This publication is dedicated to the more than 150,000 Aboriginal children across Canada who endured the Indian Residential School system, and to the memory of at least 6,000 children who perished in it.

Our goals are to honour the survivors and their families, and to help educate Canadians about the atrocious history and ongoing legacy of residential schools. Only when we understand our shared history can we move forward together in a spirit of reconciliation.

Opposite page: Children in front of church near Kamloops Indian Residential School.

The BC Teachers' Federation: Educating for truth and reconciliation



Imagine

Imagine that you are five years old. A stranger comes to your home village and seizes you from your mother's arms. Imagine he takes you hundreds of miles away to a place where white people in black robes cut off your hair and take away your clothes, the ones your mother made especially for you.

They also take away your name—you get a number instead. They separate you from your brothers and sisters, and forbid you to speak to one another in your native language. Imagine being silenced with shouts.

Imagine toiling in field and kitchen yet going hungry all the time. Imagine being hit or strapped for breaking rules you don't know or understand. Imagine learning that your family traditions and culture are evil and barbaric, while the Christian God is the only true Creator, the God of love. Imagine a heavy hand on your shoulder pulling you away from the dormitory in the night.

Imagine you're sick, feverish, and alone. Other children also coughing, gasping. Some are dying and you know it, even though they try to cover it up.

Imagine running away from it all, desperate to be safe and loved back home. Imagine being hunted and caught, then returned to even harsher punishments.

Now imagine you are a parent, your child stolen from your embrace and taken to the same cruel place you knew as a child. You could face a jail sentence if you don't obey their laws that say your child must go and learn the European ways. If you resist, your child will be taken anyway.

You worry that your child will reject your teachings and your traditional way of life. But most of all you fear that your child will endure the same abuse you did. The fact you are powerless to prevent that abuse torments you even more.

Imagine the unthinkable—your child died, far away, without you there for comfort. Imagine your child is buried in an unmarked grave, in an unknown place. Imagine they don't even tell you that your beloved child won't ever be coming home, let alone where their final resting place is.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson has challenged Canadians to try to feel the anguish of the 150,000 Aboriginal children taken from their parents, sometimes forever.

"Think of that. Bear that. Imagine that."



Kyle Irving / Eagle Vision

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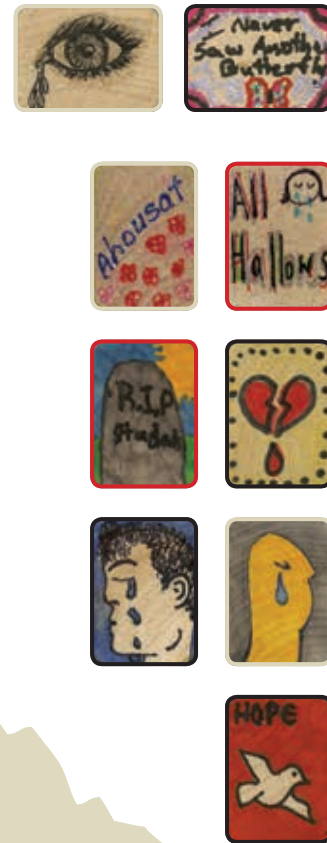
BC Indian Residential Schools



● These schools have buildings that are still standing

Ahousat	Ahousat	1903-1907	Presbyterian
Alert Bay	St. Michael's	1929-1975	Anglican
Alert Bay	Alert Bay (Girl's Home)	1888-1905	Anglican
Anahim Lake	A.L. Dormitory	1968-1977	Roman Catholic
Chemainus	Kuper Island	1890-1975	Roman Catholic
Cranbrook	St. Eugene's	1898-1970	Roman Catholic
(Ft. St. John) Fraser Lake	Lejac	(1910-1922); 1922-1976	Roman Catholic
Kamloops	Kamloops	1890-1978	Roman Catholic
Kitamaat	Elizabeth Long Memorial	1922-1944	Methodist
Lower Post	Lower Post	1951-1975	Roman Catholic
Lytton	St. George's	1901-1979	Anglican

Mission	St. Mary's	1861-1984	Roman Catholic
North Vancouver	St. Paul's	1898-1959	Roman Catholic
Port Alberni	Alberni	1909-1973	United
Port Simpson	Crosby Home for Girls	1893-1920s	Methodist
Port Simpson	Crosby Home for Boys	1903-1920s	Methodist
Sardis	Coqualeetza	1861-1866; 1866-1940	Methodist
Sechelt	Sechelt	1912-1975	Roman Catholic
Tofino	Christie/Kakawis	1900-1983	Roman Catholic
Williams Lake	Cariboo/St. Josephs Mission	1890-1953; 1953-1981	Roman Catholic
Yale	All Hallows	1869-1978	Anglican



150 years of residential schools: 150,000 children taken



For more than a century and a half, Aboriginal children across Canada were stolen from loving homes and healthy communities and forced into residential schools under a government policy to assimilate Indigenous people. As a top government official said at the time, the system was “geared towards the Final Solution to the Indian problem.” It was expressly designed “to kill the Indian in the child.”

In British Columbia, there were at least 22 residential schools mandated by the federal government and operated by the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and United Churches of Canada. Attendance at residential schools was made mandatory by law and parents who refused to send their children were threatened with fines or imprisonment.

Nonetheless, Aboriginal communities resisted the laws that ripped their families apart. Parents often hid their children deep in forests and on trap lines, anywhere the Indian agents might not go. To avoid capture, they also sent their children away to hide amongst friends or relations in distant communities. They lobbied for schools in their own communities so their children would not be taken away to get an education but their pleas were ignored. Why? Because the government’s aim was to break the bonds between Aboriginal children

and their families, communities, and cultures.

In residential schools, Aboriginal children were forbidden to speak their native languages, were taught that their cultures were inferior and that they themselves were worthless. They suffered all manner of abuse: physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and spiritual. Despite these atrocities, children in residential schools and their families at home continued to maintain their connections to each other and to their cultural heritage.

The generations who endured such trauma in childhood were silenced for decades because of the fear and shame instilled in them by cruel treatment and constant deprivation. This led to a fundamental breakdown of communities, and alienated the children from their families and cultural traditions. For many children and grandchildren of survivors, intergenerational impacts continue to be felt to this day.

Residential schools are not a thing of the distant past. It wasn't until 1984 that all residential schools in BC were closed down; the last one in Canada didn't close until 1996.

Although the history of residential schools was hidden for decades, our public education system no longer censors the past. Finally, this once-hidden history is coming

to light and the public education system is changing to reflect that. As survivors have begun to share their experiences, painful as that is to do, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers are determined to work with them to bring their knowledge into the classroom and help ensure that such massive violations of children's rights can never again take place.

That is one of the ultimate goals of the Project of Heart—to make public education itself a vehicle for healing and reconciliation.

DID YOU KNOW?

The school pictured on the cover of this publication is St. Michael's Residential School, which operated in Alert Bay from 1929–75. For the next 40 years it stood as a decaying reminder of the injustices suffered by students. On February 18, 2015, survivors and community members gathered for a ceremony to witness its demolition. They sang, prayed, and hurled rocks at the decrepit structure as the bulldozers did their work.



Project of Heart opens hearts and minds

“This is a part of our history that is not represented in the textbooks we use to teach social studies. That’s why the Project of Heart is so important, so that as Canadians we understand it and share that knowledge, because that’s where the healing starts.”

—Charlene Bearhead



Charlene Bearhead (left) and Sylvia Smith (right)

Project of Heart was founded in 2007 by Ottawa secondary school teacher Sylvia Smith, who was outraged to discover that there were only 64 words pertaining to residential schools in her students’ history textbook.

Determined to rectify this situation, Smith developed an innovative educational tool kit designed to engage students in a deeper exploration of Indigenous traditions in Canada and the history of Indian residential schools. In 2011 Native Counselling Services of Alberta took on hosting Project of Heart as part of the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation. NCSA developed a website to replace the original tool kit and began a strategic campaign to engage schools across the country. Through the Project of Heart, tens of thousands of elementary and secondary students have learned from residential school survivors about how Canadian governments, churches and society violated the

rights of Aboriginal children and families over decades.

Elders from First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities become regular participants in classroom presentations and discussions. Students lead in many of the projects demonstrating their learning in diverse ways. They also design small wooden tiles and each one becomes a meaningful artifact. The tiles have been used to create a variety of art projects in different provinces.

Smith said she is amazed by the impact the project has had on students. “We’ve had students’ reflections published in United Nations reports,” she said. “When they realize that their efforts mean

something, boy oh boy, it’s really hard to stop them.”

In 2011, Smith received the Governor General’s History Award for Excellence in Teaching. Today, with Charlene Bearhead as Coordinator, the project has expanded across Canada.



BC teachers’ commitment to truth and reconciliation



As President of the BC Teachers’ Federation, I’m very proud of the work our members are doing to educate this generation about the tragic history of Indian residential schools, a history that was deliberately hidden for over 150 years. Now, thanks to the courage of survivors, the truth is being told in classrooms, in communities, and across our country. The injustices are finally coming to light and denial is no longer an option.

The BCTF has a long-standing commitment to building new relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people based on education, mutual respect, and collective action. We’re helping make positive change through Aboriginal education enhancement agreements, employment equity, and antiracism programs. We also partner with the First Nations Education Steering Committee and others on Aboriginal education initiatives.

Recently, education faculties across BC implemented a requirement that all student teachers must complete at least one course in Aboriginal culture and history. Similarly, the BCTF advocated for changes to the provincial curriculum so that all students from

Kindergarten to Grade 12 learn about Aboriginal culture and history, including the history of residential schools.

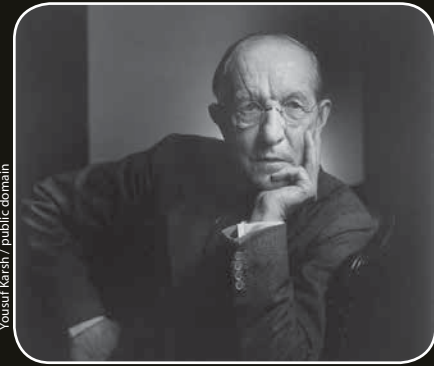
The BCTF strongly supported the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s efforts and dedicated \$100,000 to enable teachers from all over BC to travel to the TRC events in Vancouver. BC teachers also lead the way in the Project of Heart with the highest level of participation in Canada. We invited residential school survivors into our classrooms to share their stories and our students responded with open hearts and minds. They created beautiful art and wrote moving messages to survivors. Then their work was used to create the commemorative canoe that was unveiled on the TRC Education Day.

For me, as for thousands of others, it was a powerful and transformative learning experience. It made me even more aware of how important it is to acknowledge the past, take action in the present, and make positive change for the future. Together we have learned a lot but there’s much more still to be done. Please join us on our educational journey to justice.

Jim Iker

Duncan Campbell Scott

Architect of the Indian residential school system



From 1913 to his retirement in 1932, Duncan Campbell Scott served as federal Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, the highest non-elected position in the department. Scott was a fervent believer in the government's policy of "civilizing" Aboriginal children by aggressively assimilating them into the white European society. The stated goal was "to kill the Indian in the child." In 1920, he said:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department...

DID YOU KNOW?

Duncan Campbell Scott amended the Indian Act in 1920 making it mandatory for all Native children to attend residential school, knowing that the mortality rates ranged from 30%–75%.

To achieve this goal, Scott made enrolment in residential schools mandatory, even though at the same time organized delegations of First Nations were appearing before Parliament to urge the government to "make such provisions that we could be given an opportunity under the law to run our own schools in such a way as will meet the desires of the people."

Scott ignored their entreaties. What's worse, he suppressed the government's own medical health officer's information about the appalling conditions in the schools, and never changed course even though tremendous numbers of students were dying of tuberculosis, malnutrition, and other causes. He wrote:

It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department which is geared towards a final solution of our Indian Problem.

As well as being a top-level bureaucrat, Scott was a famous literary figure in his time and even today is celebrated as one of Canada's foremost Confederation poets. Some of his poems describe Aboriginal people and places, and reveal his colonialist worldview. For example, in "The Onondaga Madonna" he describes: "This woman of a weird and waning race/The tragic savage lurking in her face..."

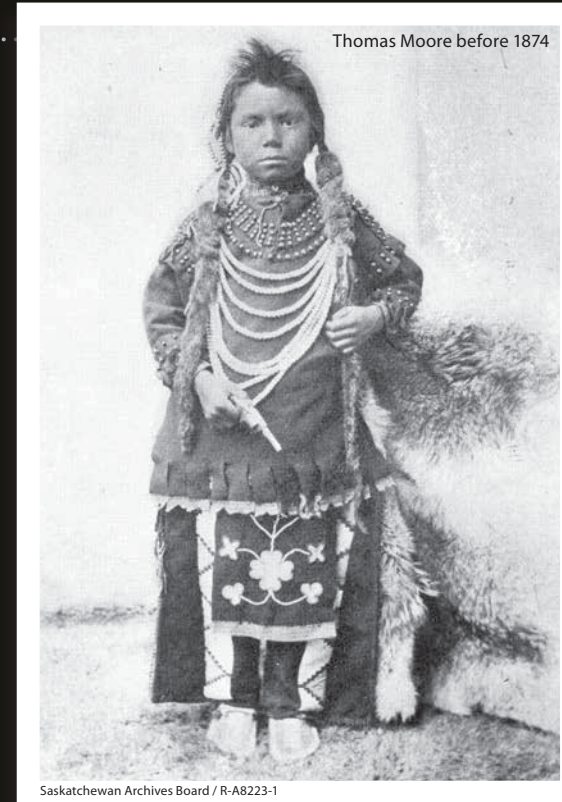
Scott's poetry is still included in literary anthologies and taught in schools, often without any reference to his mission to find "the final solution of our Indian Problem." The phrase "the final solution" today signifies Adolf Hitler's genocidal plan to exterminate the Jews of Europe. In Canada, survivors, scholars, and the Truth and Reconciliation commissioners have described the residential school system as a form of "cultural genocide."

What do you think?

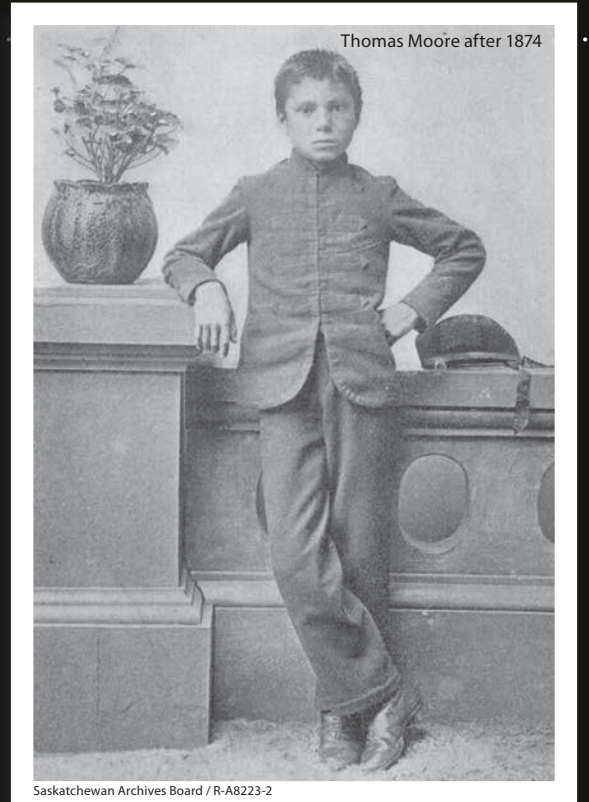
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and Discharged Pupils of Indian Industrial and Boarding Schools.

Present Condition of all Pupils.						Present Condition of Ex-Pupils.					
Good.		Sick.		Dead.		Good.		Sick.		Dead.	
Number of pupils.	p.c.	Number of pupils.	p.c.	Number of pupils.	p.c.	Number of pupils.	p.c.	Number of pupils.	p.c.	Number of pupils.	p.c.
112	60	58	9	57	30	9	29	1	3	21	69
99	65	29	15	32	30						
		8	9	26	30						



Saskatchewan Archives Board / R-A8223-1



Saskatchewan Archives Board / R-A8223-2

The Canadian government staged dramatic "before and after" photos of Aboriginal children. In the before photo, Thomas Moore, a student in the Regina Indian Industrial School, is dressed as a "savage" holding a revolver. In the after photo, he is "civilized" in his suit. Propaganda like this was used by the Department of Indian Affairs to justify the residential school system. Few knew that both the before and after photos were faked images with no connection to the Cree boy's real life. Thomas Moore's "before" clothing includes women's traditional attire which a male would never wear.

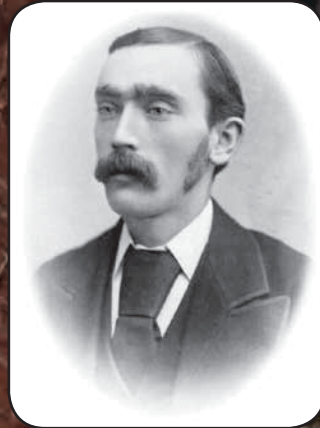
—Residential Schools With the Words and Images of Survivors, By Larry Loyie with Wayne K. Spear and Constance Brissenden, Indigenous Education Press, 2014



The General Synod Archives, Anglican Church of Canada / P75-103-57-184 / Old Sun School, Gleichen, Alta. – Senior classroom, 1945

Peter Henderson Bryce

The doctor who blew the whistle on a national crime



Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce was a principled and energetic pioneer of public health in Canada. Trained at the University of Toronto, and later in Edinburgh and Paris, he became a leading expert on tuberculosis. He served as Canada's first Chief Medical Health Officer from 1904–21.

In 1907, after visiting 35 schools across the Prairie provinces, Bryce issued a damning report that exposed the appalling health standards in residential schools. Communicable diseases, especially TB, killed on average 24% of children. In one school, he reported the death rate was a staggering 75%.

Bryce made practical recommendations for improvement, as he was confident that medical science knew how to prevent such diseases and avoid needless deaths. He urged swift implementation of his recommendations, but government quietly relegated his report to the back shelf and did nothing. He wrote repeatedly to Duncan Campbell Scott—and to Scott's superiors—calling on them to implement his suggestions, but ultimately Bryce was let go, his position eliminated, his reputation undermined, and his research discontinued.

It wasn't until 1922, after he was officially retired, that Bryce was finally able to publish his landmark study: *The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of*

Canada. In it, he presented irrefutable evidence that TB was killing students and the government was failing to prevent their deaths.

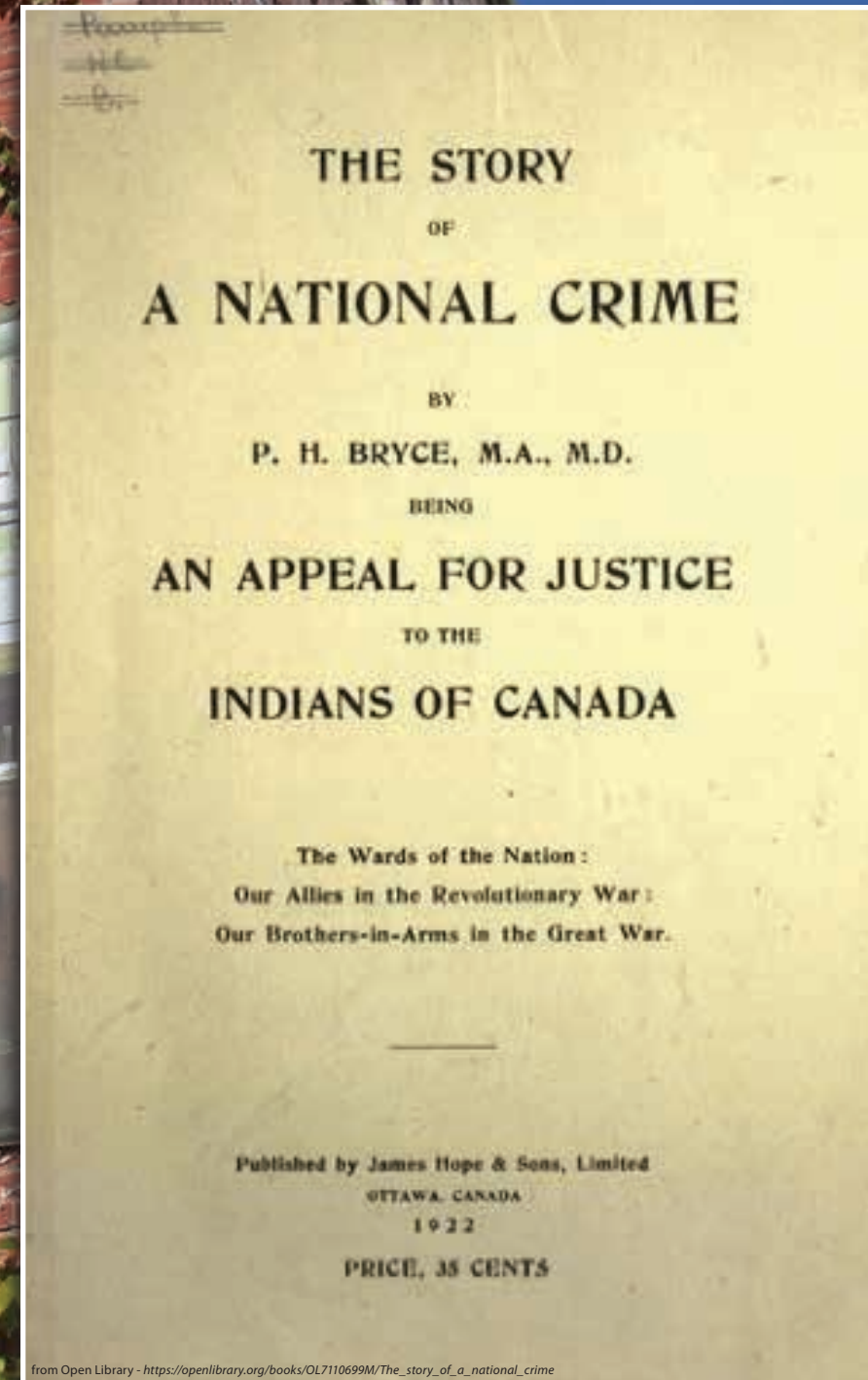
After that, the government couldn't pretend not to know, yet the schools were not closed until 74 years later.

Dr. Bryce is seen by many as a hero of this dark chapter in Canadian history. His scientific work provided irrefutable evidence of the suffering of thousands of children in these institutions. Beyond that, at a time when many others were silent or complicit, he spoke out fearlessly for the most vulnerable and for their rights to healthcare.

We cannot “unknow” this. Now that you know about this, what can you do?

“**Dr. Bryce stood up for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children even when it was a hard thing to do because other people criticized him. He knew what was right and, in a peaceful and respectful way, kept on trying to help the children.**”

—Cindy Blackstock, *First Nations Child and Family Caring Society*



Lessons learned from Duncan Campbell Scott and Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce

So what is there to learn from these two men? Ninety years on, the Department of Indian Affairs continues to act as a bureaucratic impediment to basic improvements in education, health and social improvement. There is nothing accidental about this dysfunction. It is the result of decades of deliberate policy choices—the same choices that promoted Duncan Campbell Scott while suppressing the work of Peter Henderson Bryce.

Ninety years on, we have the job of undoing these wrong choices. It is time that we put our nation back on the right road with our treaty partners. So, it may seem like a century too late, but thank you Peter Bryce for your dedication and public service.

—Charlie Angus, MP,
Timmins-James Bay,
in www.rabble.ca
Dec. 20, 2013.



GLADYS WE NEVER KNEW

One child, among thousands, who didn't survive residential school

According to the Vital Statistics Act document entitled "RETURN OF DEATH OF AN INDIAN," Gladys Chapman was 12 years, 10 months, and 12 days old on April 29, 1931, when she died in Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops. Occupation of the deceased was listed as "Schoolgirl." On her death certificate, Dr. M.G. Archibald reported "acute dilation of heart" as the cause of death, with tuberculosis as the secondary cause. The duration of death was "several days."

So, at the end, a little girl named Gladys endured days of fevered suffering—coughing, bleeding, struggling for breath—all alone, far from home, with no loved one to comfort her. She was one of the thousands of children whose deaths are acknowledged and lamented in the landmark report released in June 2015 by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a report that describes our country's treatment of Indigenous people as "cultural genocide." The TRC has established a National Residential School Student Death Register which contains the names of 3,200 children, although the estimated number of deaths is believed to be more than 6,000.

Gladys's family members believe that she never would have died at such a tender age had she not been



L-R: Mrs. Carlson, Charles Stromquist, Matilda Stromquist and two of their children, Harold and Helmer

Sandra Dickson

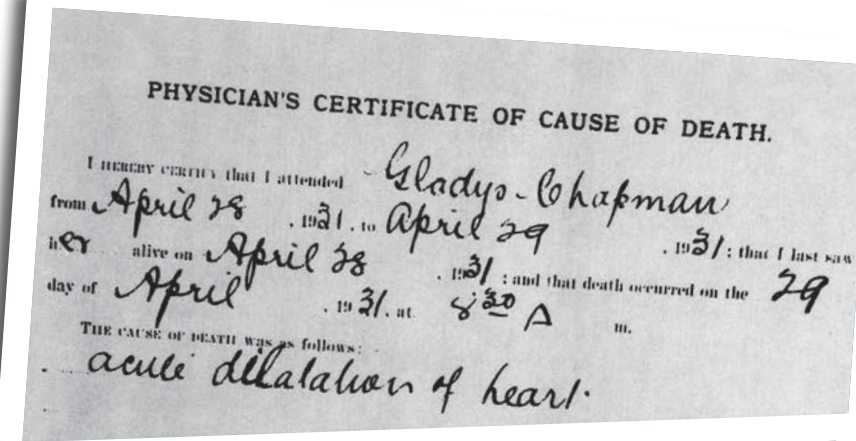
forced into the Indian residential school system. A member of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, she was part of a large extended family with deep roots in Spuzzum, a small community on the Fraser River north of Hope. Her relations have a deep awareness of the damage inflicted upon generations of children and families. Gladys's mother, Matilda, had also been taken to residential school as a girl and she knew all too well what took place there.

"Just imagine how horrible it would have been for parents and grandparents who themselves had lived through residential school abuse, watching their little ones being taken, knowing what they were going

to go through," says Gail Stromquist, Gladys's niece.

Gail and her sister Janet, like the vast majority of Canadians both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, grew up with no knowledge of the Indian residential school system. "We played skip rope and sang the song about how in fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue," Gail said. "The myth of Columbus's 'discovery' of the Americas was all we learned in school, nothing about residential schools or the culture of Aboriginal people before contact."

Even though many people in their family and community were living with the terrible legacy of residential



Division No. 3.
VITAL STATISTICS ACT.
(Being Chapter 268, R.S.B.C. 1921.)

RETURN OF DEATH OF AN INDIAN.

To the Indian Agent,
Lytton, B.C.

1. Full name of deceased. Gladys Chapman,
2. Where died. Royal Inland Hospital, Kamloops, B. C.,
3. Reserve and band or tribe. Spuzzum I.R. & Band, Fraser-Salish Tribe,
4. When died. April 29, 1931,
5. Sex. Female,
6. Single, married, widowed, or divorced. Single,
7. Age. 12 years, 10 months, 12 days.
8. Where born. Spuzzum I.R.,
9. Religious denomination. Roman Catholic,
10. Occupation of deceased. Schoolgirl,
11. Name of father. John Chapman,
12. Birthplace of father. Spuzzum I.R.,
13. Maiden name of mother. Matilda Andrew,
14. Birthplace of mother. Spuzzum I.R.,
15. In case no physician attended, reported cause of death to be herein entered, together with duration of illness.
16. Place of burial. Spuzzum Indian Burying-ground,

schools, the history was so deeply hidden that the sisters only recently learned about the fate of the auntie they never knew. No photos remain of her and her name was never spoken by her surviving siblings, some of whom have struggled to deal with their own devastating experiences in residential school.

Today both Stromquist sisters are public school teachers, passionately involved in the kind of reconciliatory educational work that Justice Murray Sinclair called for among the 94 recommendations in the historic TRC report. Janet works as a district teacher for the Aboriginal program in Langley and Gail co-ordinates Aboriginal education initiatives for the BC Teachers' Federation. The sisters' need to learn the truth of their own family experience, and their desire to teach the truth about our shared history led them to do extensive research in local archives. It also led them to gently question their relatives about long-buried memories. Little by little, they pieced together Gladys's story.

She was one of five siblings from the same family taken to residential schools. Even though it was mandatory by law for all Indigenous children to be enrolled and parents who resisted faced prison sentences, their mother Matilda did manage to hide one of her sons from the Indian agent. The boy was in frail health and she feared he would not survive the deprivation and abuse at school. Tragically, and despite her best efforts, she couldn't save all her children.

Widowed at a young age, in 1929 Matilda married a Swedish immigrant named Charles Stromquist, with whom she had a long, happy marriage and 10 more children. "We have often imagined what a comfort it must have been to Nanny after she

married Grandpa Stromquist to know that no more of her children could be taken away from her to residential school," Gail said.

Gladys was taken to Kamloops Residential School, one of the largest in Canada. An imposing brick institution run by Roman Catholic priests and the Sisters of Saint Ann, it operated from 1890 to 1978 with as many as 440 children enrolled at its peak in the 1950s. For girls, mornings were spent in class, while afternoons were spent cleaning or working in the garden or kitchen. They did not get to eat the food they grew and prepared. The boys were taught some carpentry and other trades. All students had heavy religious instruction in English. The children were forbidden to speak their native languages or practice their own spirituality. Families were allowed to visit, but they rarely did so because of the long distances between school and home.

Conditions in the Kamloops school were atrocious, but typical of residential schools across Canada. Neglect and abuse—sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual—were rampant. Many children tried to run away, only to be caught and punished for trying to get home. Some children attempted or committed suicide. But communicable disease was the worst threat. Underfunding, overcrowding, poor sanitary and ventilation systems, inadequate clothing, malnourishment, and a lack of medical care all contributed to epidemic levels of tuberculosis and other illnesses.

The federal government had known for decades that such conditions were killing children, but failed to act. In 1907, Canada's first chief medical health officer, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, issued a report that exposed the appalling health standards in residential schools where, on average, TB killed 24% of the children. In one

school on the Prairies the death rate was a staggering 75%. Dr. Bryce's work was suppressed by the government and it wasn't until 1922 when he retired that he could publish his full report, *The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada*.

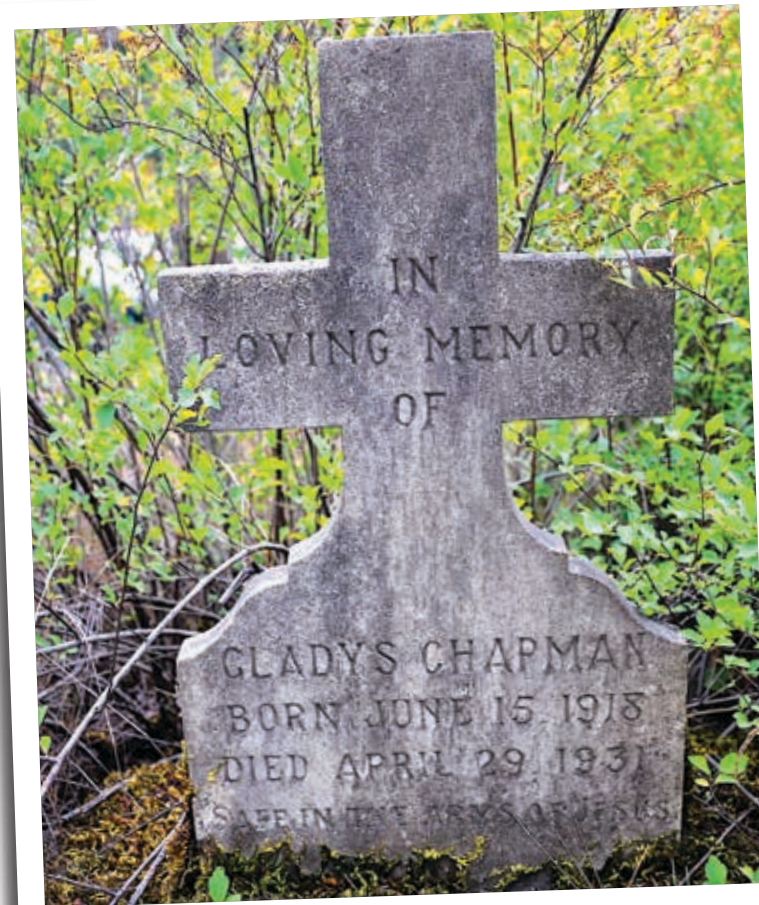
In 2014, the government of British Columbia released to the TRC more than 4,000 documents, including death records for Aboriginal children aged 4 to 19. Many families were never informed of the deaths of their children, some of whom were buried in unmarked graves near the schools. No one knows how Matilda learned of the death of her daughter, but it is certain that the only reason she was able to bury Gladys in the community cemetery at Spuzzum was that her husband worked for the CNR and thus could get her body transported home

by rail. Gladys's gravestone in what the official records called the "Spuzzum Indian Burying-ground" reads:

*In loving memory of Gladys Chapman
Born June 15, 1918
Died April 29, 1931
Safe in the arms of Jesus*

Tragically, neither Jesus nor her loving family could save Gladys from the racist and assimilationist policies that destroyed her young life.

The Kamloops Residential School still stands to this day, a decaying reminder of the dark history we all must confront as Canadians. The last residential school in BC finally closed its doors in 1984, the last in Canada not until 1996. This is not ancient history. It lives on in memory of thousands of Canadians whose childhood was stolen and whose



Janet Stromquist

education was perverted by the government's determination to "kill the Indian in the child."

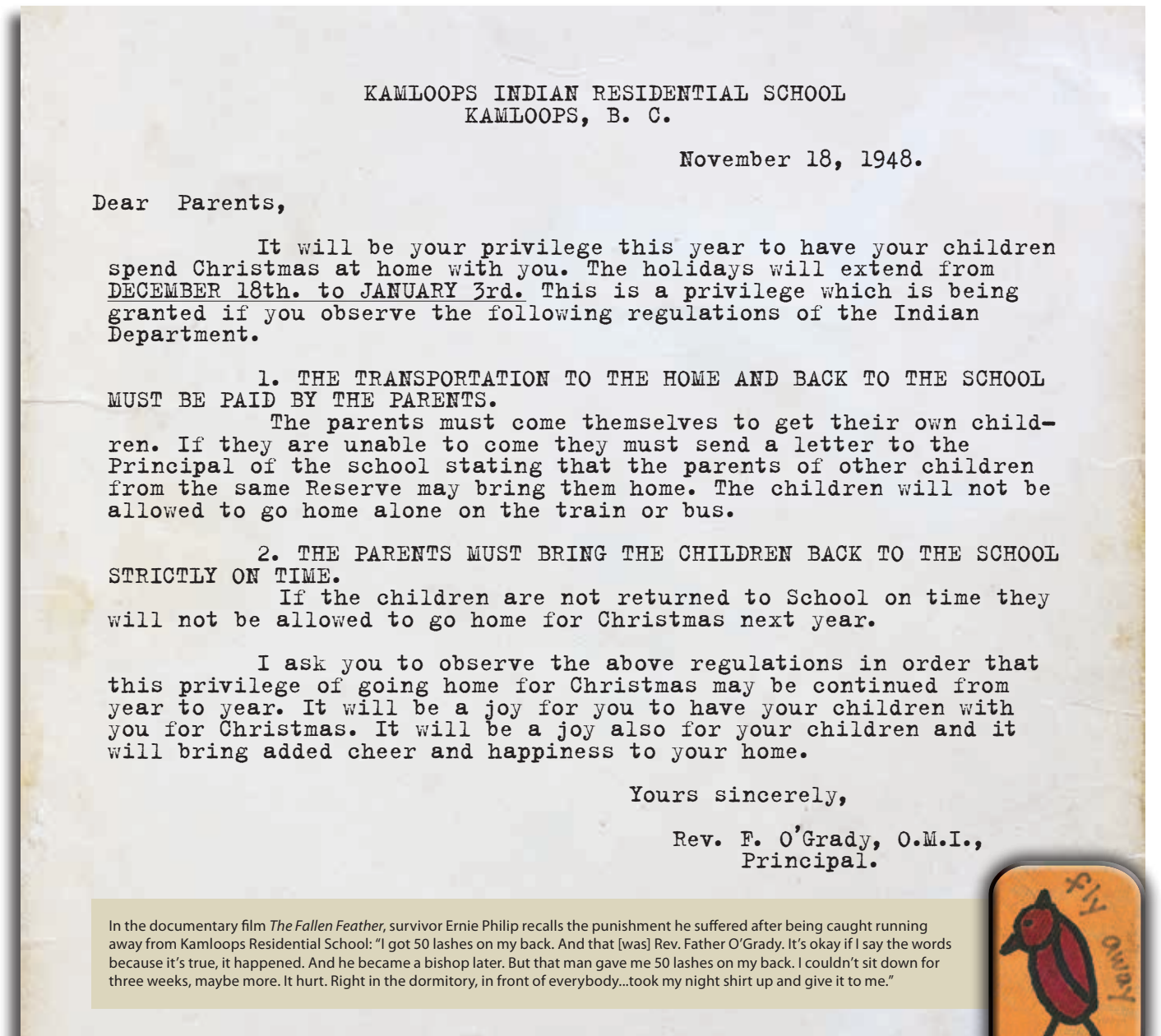
Janet and Gail Stromquist share Justice Sinclair's conviction that because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people and the misleading of all Canadians, education holds the key to reconciliation. They say the most frequent response to their teaching is: "I never knew about any of this."

"People have told me that they lived right beside one or another of the schools and never knew what went on there. They went through their entire schooling and never learned anything about this," Gail says. "Some of our secondary students get quite angry about it, feeling their education has been censored."

"Learning directly from a survivor is a powerful and unforgettable experience. We honour the strength and courage

of the many residential school survivors who have come forward to share their stories," Janet says.

For the Stromquist sisters, it's clear that their life's work will continue to be educating the next generation about the truths of the past, shining a light on the hidden history, giving voice to those who were silenced, and helping to create the conditions where true reconciliation can take place.



In the documentary film *The Fallen Feather*, survivor Ernie Philip recalls the punishment he suffered after being caught running away from Kamloops Residential School: "I got 50 lashes on my back. And that [was] Rev. Father O'Grady. It's okay if I say the words because it's true, it happened. And he became a bishop later. But that man gave me 50 lashes on my back. I couldn't sit down for three weeks, maybe more. It hurt. Right in the dormitory, in front of everybody...took my night shirt up and give it to me."



Childhood marked by humiliation and shame

A First Nations elder shares her experiences of residential school with Brookwood students

February 19, 2013

By Heather Colpitts

Josette Antone Dandurand held up three sheets of toilet paper.

Having to go to nuns as a small child and ask for toilet paper and receiving much less than needed for the job remains one of the humiliating memories from her nine years in residential school.

And it's one of the personal stories the 70-year-old shared with Brookwood Secondary students during presentations to four classes on Feb. 14. The classes are taking part in Project of Heart, a residential school healing project that started in Ottawa and spread across the country.

Her sessions on Valentine's Day included the many heartbreaking events of her childhood. "I feel that I didn't have a childhood," she said.

Dandurand, whose mother was Kwantlen First Nation and father was Nooksack, was seven when the Indian Agent and the RCMP arrived to take the children. She came from a family of six children, all sent to residential schools.

A priest at the Kuper Island residential school molested her. It was only in recent times that she won a legal case against him for that abuse.

Soon after arriving, a seven-year-old Josette, who had never seen flush toilets, wet her bed at night. In the morning, she told a nun and she was made, along with any other girls who wet their beds, to parade in front of the rest of the students with the soiled bed linens wrapped around their heads.



If she ever wet her bed after that, she never told a soul. "I chose to sleep in a wet bed," Dandurand said.

One morning she could not find her hankie for daily inspections. "I lost my hankie so I was made an example," she said.

The mother superior strapped her in front of the other children. Her older sister's advice: "You don't move your hand and you don't cry. How many times I hear that—you don't cry."

The children were forced to work in the school dairy and orchard but were not allowed to have any of the food which was sold for money. Instead they were fed cheap food like potatoes and peas, although the students did get to watch the staff eat well.

Despite not accepting the Catholicism imposed on her as a child, Dandurand said she prays each day because she always wants to express her gratitude for what is good in her life.

Prayer and gratitude are some of the tools she uses in her healing. So is

sharing her stories. "I don't ever want this to happen again," she said.

Residential school students were taught that everything about them was bad or wrong, part of the government's decision to assimilate Aboriginal peoples. "Never be ashamed of who you are," Dandurand told the students.

Her presentation recounted the broad and lasting impacts of residential schools. In her life, it led to two decades of alcoholism before her adult sons asked her to stop.

Within her siblings and their families there have been traumas and scars directly tied to the residential school experiences some six decades ago. One brother was so traumatized by the school dentists that when his teeth failed, he would pull them out himself, until he had none left.

There have been suicides, drug and alcohol abuse, and an array of relationship problems. "We never talked about the things that happened to us in residential school," she said.

Dandurand did what she had to do to survive those nine years and found solace in learning. After graduating she went into the Canadian Air Force, where the fighter control operator met her husband of 44 years and lived in various spots around Canada and abroad.

"Air force life was a piece of cake for me compared to residential school," Dandurand said.

Through Dandurand's presentation, Grade 8 students Lauren Chevrier, Angel Dick and Lee Strutinski got to put a face on what could have just been a paragraph in a textbook.

"We can think about it more and imagine what it was like," Chevrier said.

"It's more personalized," Strutinski said.

She noted that her mom's generation didn't learn about residential schools when they were young.

Strutinski said she read a book by a survivor of the residential school so the subject was not new to her, like it was for Dick and Chevrier but all were disheartened to learn that this was a recent part of Canadian history.

The students taking part in Project of Heart drew on small wooden tiles in memory of the children who've died because of residential schools. Dick and Strutinski made their tiles into a dream-catcher to capture bad dreams created by the trauma the children went through, while Chevrier's design with a heart was her desire to combat the heartbreaking history she learned.

Project of Heart tiles will be put on permanent display in Vancouver.

Teacher Larry Goldsack said he invites speakers such as Dandurand because the students gain a deeper understanding of how history and issues impact people.

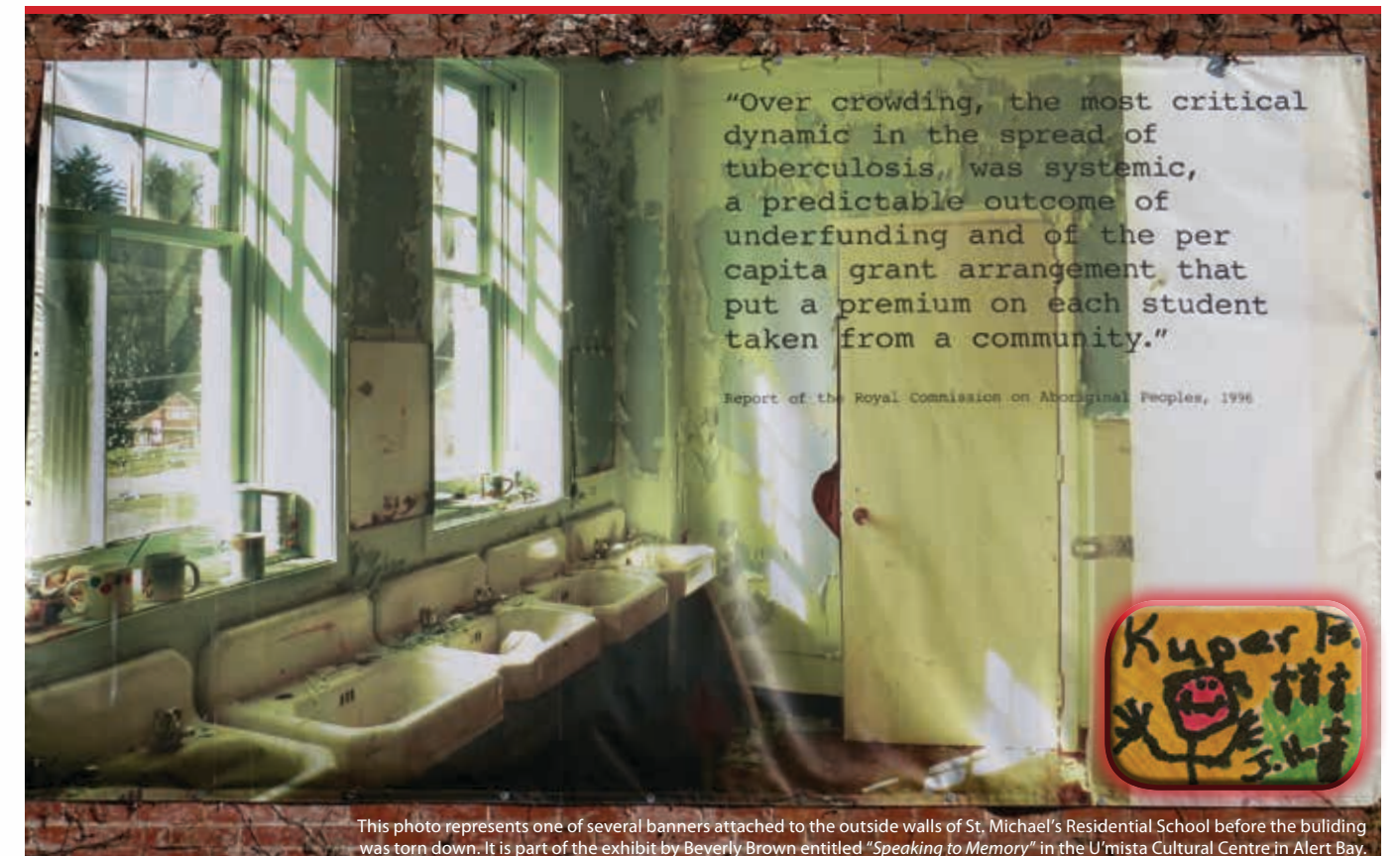
He took part in Project of Heart when he was at another school last year but didn't get to complete the several phases.

"This whole Project of Heart is something that's long overdue," Goldsack said.

He said since he introduced it for three of his Brookwood classes, other teachers have joined the campaign.

The end result is that these young people are talking about issues raised by the history of this country, and First Nations elders find healing in talking about their experiences and having those acknowledged by the broader society.

—hcolpitts@langleyadvance.com
Reprinted with permission from the Langley Advance.



This photo represents one of several banners attached to the outside walls of St. Michael's Residential School before the building was torn down. It is part of the exhibit by Beverly Brown entitled "Speaking to Memory" in the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay.

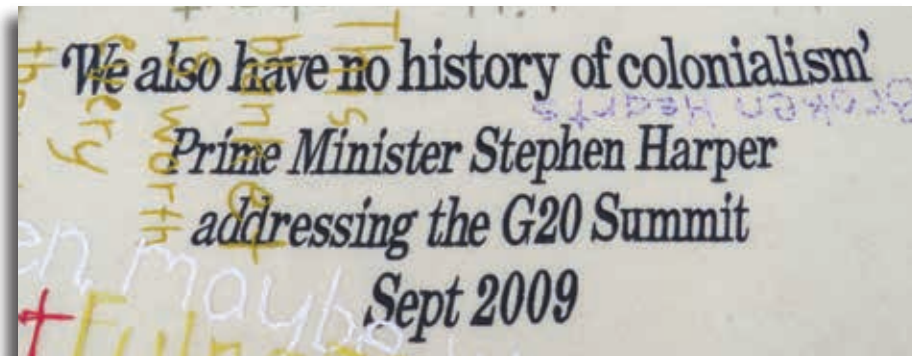
Canadians were in denial about residential school truths



Canadians generally think of themselves as good, decent, polite people who quietly but firmly do the right thing, play by the rules, stand up for peace, order and good government. However, this benign national self-image is actually in sharp contrast to our colonial history, and we tend to deny any uncomfortable reminders of that.

Denial has taken many forms in Canada's history and treatment of Aboriginal peoples. For example, we often hear the claim that residential schools were run by well-meaning people who truly believed they were doing the right thing by bringing Christianity and "civilization" to "primitive" people who perhaps didn't understand it was all for their own good. But at the same time they were in denial about the very humanity of the students they claimed to be educating and bringing to God. (One can easily imagine the reaction of early settlers if First Nations had forcibly taken 150,000 white children far away from their homes to be raised in Aboriginal ways for their own good!)

The government and churches also denied the truth about the appalling conditions in residential schools. Officials suppressed Dr. Peter Bryce's report about the epidemic levels of



TB. The fate of children who died running away to get back home was hidden. So were the suicides of children in total despair. Priests covered up for sexual predators, often simply transferring them to other schools. Nuns denied that babies were born of rape. No one spoke of the graveyards outside the schoolyards.

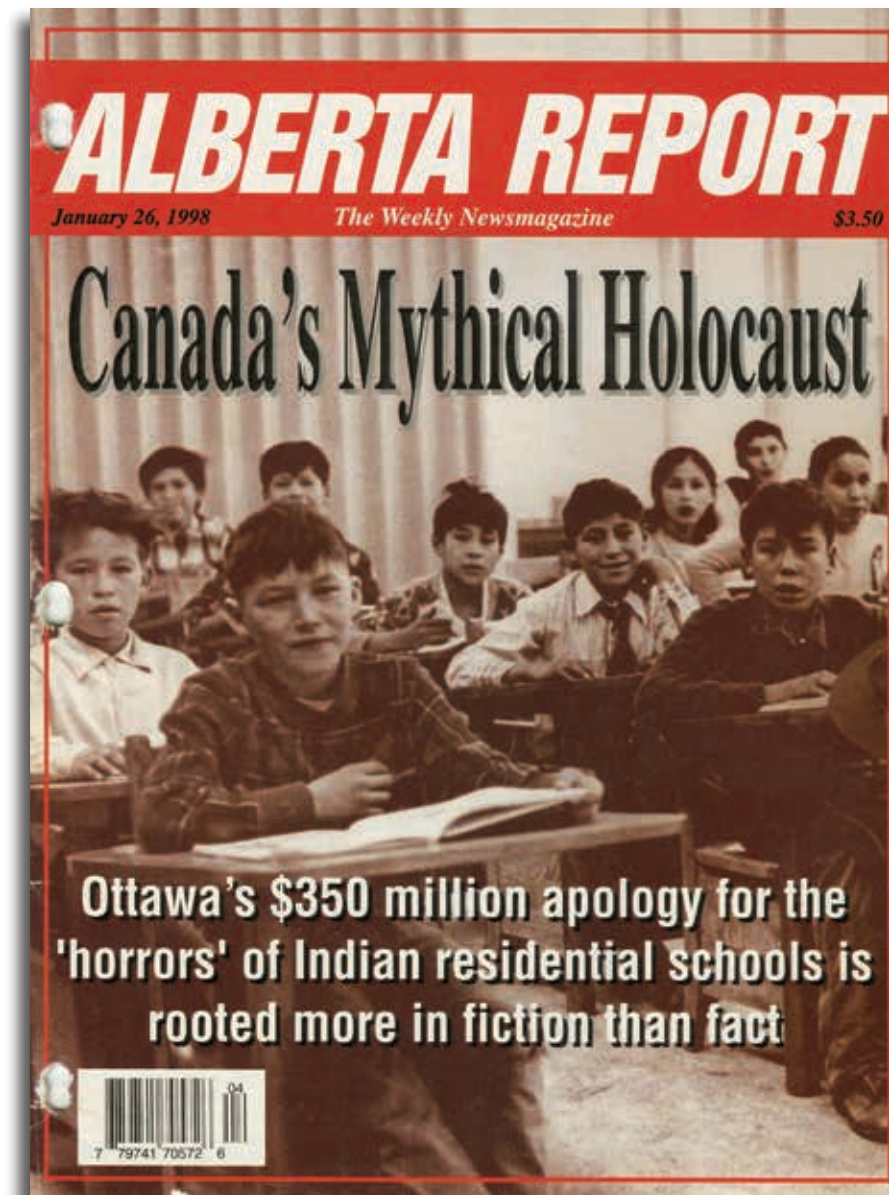
The culture of denial was so pervasive for so long that most Canadians knew nothing about the existence of residential schools and what went on there, and that lack of awareness continues today. This denial made it easy to blame the victims for the inevitable consequences of cultural breakdown, family dysfunction, poverty, addiction, and incarceration.

In 1990 Phil Fontaine, head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, first

began speaking out about the prevalence of the abuse he endured in residential school. His shocking account was met with more denial and skepticism.

Subsequently other survivors launched class action law suits, but the federal government and the churches vigorously denied their testimony, and both institutions devoted vast sums of money and many years to fighting them in court. Plaintiffs were subjected to merciless cross-examination about not only their victimization in the schools, but also every other aspect of their personal and family lives.

Over time the evidence mounted, pedophiles who had preyed on students were convicted, and gradually it became impossible



to maintain the denials. Facing increasing pressure, by 1998 government had to do something. Jane Stewart, then Minister of Indian Affairs, made a formal apology to those who were abused at residential schools, and the federal government established a \$350 million healing fund for the victims. In reaction, media such as the right-wing Alberta

Report didn't hesitate to deny the truth and inflame the debate. However, most credible media outlets set to work investigating the untold stories of residential schools.

It is said that every generation needs to re-evaluate the official version of history, the version so often written by the victors. Indeed, that

re-evaluation now is taking place in light of the truths being told by those who have been silenced for so long. And that's a very good thing.

Unless we confront that hidden chapter of Canada's history, we won't be able to become the kind of people we think we already are.

“Survivors who have spoken out say if you file a residential school claim expect your life to get worse before it gets better. Even if you think you put those abuse issues behind you 20 or 40 years ago and you are all right now. You'd better be well along on your healing journey or have a lot of family support, they say, because there's no telling how many times you are going to have to relive the horror and shame once the church and government lawyers get to you. The official apologies mean nothing, they assert, when you get a church lawyer in your face calling you a liar.”

—Joan Taillon, *Windspeaker*, 2001



Students create art from painful truth of residential schools



Melissa Hyland and Mercy Thomas at a BCTF conference on trafficking of Aboriginal girls and women.

In her native Nisga'a language, her first name meant "pearl skipping on clear water." But that beautiful name was taken away the day she arrived in residential school, where she was called Mercy instead. Sadly, little Mercy Thomas saw no evidence of merciful behaviour from the staff of Crosby Girls School in Port Simpson where strapping, hair-pulling, pushing, name-calling, being made to stand for hours, and other forms of verbal, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse were common.

It was one of 22 residential schools in BC, part of a nation-wide network of schools run by government and churches with the goal of "killing the Indian in the child." Now, more

than half a century later, Mercy and other survivors of residential school injustices are reclaiming the past by telling their stories to students across the country through a remarkable initiative called the Project of Heart.

The Project of Heart brings residential school survivors into classrooms to tell their stories and to involve students and teachers in seeking the truth about this atrocious, hidden chapter of Canadian history. Students then draw on what they've learned to create images on wooden tiles, which are being collected and used to create large works of art.



“It’s hard to think that these really bad things happened right here in Canada. We’re not perfect, like some people think we are.”

The students in Larry Goldsack’s Social Studies 8 class at Brookwood Secondary School in Langley listened intently as Mercy told them: “Think back to when you were seven. Your parents were getting you ready to go to school, but you always knew they’d come for you at the end of the day. That didn’t happen for me.”

She recalled the constant abuse: “You good-for-nothing, dirty, lazy Indian! If you hear that every day, you start to believe it. Some of us fought against it and we left school stronger. Others fell by the wayside and died.”

Mercy was one of 150,000 First Nations children who were forced into the residential school system between the 1870s and 1990s. Recent research reveals more than 6,000 children died in the schools—of tuberculosis and Spanish flu, in fires, by drowning or exposure while fleeing, and by suicide. In the latest shocking revelation, scholars have now shown that the federal government conducted nutritional experimentation on at least 1,300 Aboriginal people, most of them hungry children in six different residential schools across Canada, including the one in Port Alberni.

“Our days were punctuated by the supervisors’ whistle. As soon as it blew, we had to be on guard. Whistles

to wake up, get up, stand by the bed, go to the washroom, eat your meals, do your chores. The supervisor always had a horsewhip under her arm and if we didn’t get into line fast enough, we’d feel that whip on our ankles.”

“What did you learn in residential school?” one Brookwood student wanted to know. “We learned English because we were not allowed to speak our language. We only had classes in the morning, and then we cleaned, cooked, sewed, did laundry, worked in the gardens. But we never saw the vegetables we grew on our table. They were sold in the city.”

When she was 14, Mercy was sexually abused by the minister who was also principal of the school. “The rape of a child, male or female, is devastating. It shatters a child’s well-being and future development as a human being. Sexual abuse is a very touchy subject for all former students of residential schools. It is demeaning in the worst way and has long-term impacts.”

Did you ever think about running away? “Oh yes, millions of times.”

Why didn’t you? “Because the school was 1,500 miles from my home. Years later, they found skeletons beneath the floors. These were of all the children they said had run away. There were rows and rows of graves.”

At some level there is no healing for the survivors, Mercy said. “We will go to our graves carrying this hurt. There is not enough money in the world to buy away the hurt, shame, humiliation, loss of identity, and near annihilation of Aboriginal culture. It was nearly genocide.”



UCCA, 93.049P / 181, "Twelve of our girls, with staff," Crosby Girls' Home, Port Simpson, [ca. 1947]

At Brookwood Secondary School, students’ heads nod around the classroom as one girl said: “It’s hard to think that these really bad things happened right here in Canada. We’re not perfect, like some people think we are.”

Teacher Larry Goldsack says his passion for history fuels his commitment to teaching these painful truths.

Charlene Bearhead, program manager of the Project of Heart, says that BC is ahead of other provinces on the issues of Aboriginal education and has a record participation of hundreds of teachers and thousands of students. “The commitment to look at the truth is really exceptional in this province,” she said.

The wooden tiles created by BC students will be used to adorn a cedar canoe created especially for the Project

of Heart by Tsleil-Waututh carver Derrick George and his sons, and designed by Tahltan artist Una Ann Moyer. It will have an important part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission national commemorative events taking place in Vancouver in September.

Mercy Thomas will be among the survivors there, honouring the memory of those who did not survive and helping build a better future for First Nations children, their families, and communities. “If not for all the people now telling their stories, all that would remain hidden.”

—Reprinted from *Teacher*, September 2013.



After the Prime Minister's apology, calls for action



Residential school survivors across Canada wept as Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the wrongs they suffered.

Bruce Edwards / Edmonton Journal

On Wednesday, June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper rose in the House of Commons to make an extraordinary speech, an historic apology to former students of Indian residential schools. In part, he said:

To the approximately 80,000 living former students and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that far too often these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you.

Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time, and in a very real sense we are now joining you on this journey. The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

We are sorry....

Grand Chief responds with dignity and pride

Many of you will know me as Edward John, Grand Chief, Tl'azt'en Nation and an elected member of the First Nations Summit. In days gone by I was #34 at Lejac Indian Residential School where I was sent at a very young age....

On this day the Prime Minister extends a long overdue apology to us, the Indigenous Peoples, for the fundamentally racist and genocidal policies underpinning the entire residential schools system—"to kill the Indian in the child."

We had a dream that one day we would be here.

Today we listened intently to the Prime Minister's statement of apology waiting to hear sincere, meaningful and truthful words which would bring comfort and solace to our peoples and in particular the thousands of residential school survivors....

Today we wanted to hear the Prime Minister say sorry to the countless survivors who suffered serious emotional, cultural, linguistic, spiritual, physical, and sexual abuses at the hands of those in residential schools to whom they were entrusted as children.

Today we wanted to hear the Prime Minister say sorry to those courageous survivors who were dragged through the indignities of the criminal and civil courts processes.

In short we wanted to hear a full acknowledgment from the Prime Minister of these past injustices, unequivocal acceptance of responsibility, genuine remorse and a sincere commitment not to repeat these traumatic and culturally crippling actions....

Except for the Prime Minister's apology today, the actions of government and churches were in direct response to criminal and civil actions brought before this country's courts by survivors. For years prior to these cases we raised this as a political issue with successive governments only to be told that neither the churches nor governments had any legal responsibility or obligation. It wasn't until the issue came before the courts did they pay any attention....

We collectively owe a deep sense of thanks and respect to all of these courageous women and men whose dignity was put on public display and ridiculed by unbelieving government and churches. Their brave actions paved the difficult road to today's apology by the Prime Minister.

We want all Canadians to know we have survived and that we will celebrate this. We stand on the dignity of our being and on strength of our cultural teachings, beliefs and practices. And we will work on the ongoing development of our individual and collective well being.

With the Prime Minister's commitments, let us move from apology to action with dignity and pride.



Uvic Photo Services

DID YOU KNOW?

"We also have no history of colonialism."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper made this unbelievable statement during the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh in September 2009, just one year after his historic apology to Aboriginal Canadians for the injustices of residential schools.

The statement not only reveals that Harper failed to understand the true purpose of residential school policies, it also provides a powerful example of an all-too-common response from many Canadians when

confronted with difficult historical facts: denial.



Resistance and resilience

Throughout a century and a half of residential school history, Aboriginal children and families across Canada courageously

resisted the policies and laws that tore apart their families and communities.

In the early years many parents simply refused to enrol their children but after 1920, when attendance at residential schools was made mandatory by law, parents began hiding their children from school and church officials despite the potential legal repercussions. In other cases, parents withdrew their children en masse to protest terrible conditions or harsh discipline in the schools. They demanded dismissal of abusive or incompetent staff. Later they hired lawyers to press for investigations into the deaths of children who ran away, or on behalf of children who were injured working at the schools.

The children themselves also resisted in many ways, both big and small. As the TRC commissioners reported: "We heard about children whose small acts of everyday resistance in the face of rampant abuse, neglect, and bullying in the schools were quite simply heroic. At the TRC British Columbia National Event, Elder

Barney Williams said that 'many of us, through our pain and suffering, managed to hold our heads up...we were brave children.'"

Many students ran away from the deprivation and abuse, often more than once and always at great personal risk. At least 33 runaways died, mostly from exposure. Many more endured severe punishment after being caught and

returned to the schools. In the documentary film *The Fallen Feather*, survivor Dan Saul says: "They would send the police after these little kids, to bring them back. They would shave their heads, starve them, beat them up just because they ran away.... But there were still more runaways, people just wanted to get out of there so bad."

So desperate were they to get out of residential schooling that students made at least 37 attempts to burn down different schools; two of the fires resulted in student and staff deaths.

In recent decades, resistance has taken many other forms: legal, political, social, cultural, academic, linguistic, artistic, and more. Despite

the emotional costs of revisiting painful memories, thousands of survivors and their descendants now are telling their stories, setting the historical record straight, and demanding redress. They are speaking out to the media, publishing memoirs, creating works of visual and performance art, reviving almost-lost languages, researching the past, and—perhaps most importantly—testifying in court. Thousands of lawsuits for historical abuses filed against government and churches resulted in the historic Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and the landmark work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The TRC sponsored many different projects during its mandate, but a digital storytelling project at the University of Victoria specifically examined the critical role resistance played in the residential schools and beyond. The project co-ordinator concluded: "The passion of resistance that validates the survival and resiliency of First Nations people and communities provides hope for healing and reconciliation over the next seven generations."



© Violator Films / Clique Pictures. Photo by Kris Krug

Commemoration Canoe on a journey to justice



In the fall of 2012, the BC Teachers' Federation was selected by Project of Heart to host the Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Commemoration Project for Indian residential school survivors in BC. The project saw the collaboration of teachers and students from over 270 BC schools, working with Aboriginal artists Derrick George and Una Ann Moyer, to create the beautiful embellished canoe that has come to symbolize healing and reconciliation.

Teachers who signed up to do Project of Heart had residential school survivors tell their stories in the classroom. Then their students created artworks on wooden tiles to pay tribute to children who died in residential schools, to honour survivors, and to create awareness for all Canadians. Through the tiles

students expressed their learning and their commitment to building respectful relationships and a better future together.

Tsleil-Waututh carver Derrick George, an intergenerational survivor, carved a 16-foot dugout canoe with his three sons as a means of bringing back the tradition of carving within his family. Because Derrick's father went to residential school, this important skill that had been previously passed down from one generation to another was lost. With great pride and generosity, Derrick and his sons donated the canoe to the BCTF as the foundation for the commemoration piece.

Tahltan artist Una Ann Moyer, Aboriginal support worker for Langley School District, utilized her

talents and skill to weave together the stories of survivors, Derrick's family canoe, and the tiles from participating schools to create a powerful healing piece—the Project of Heart Commemoration Canoe.

The canoe was blessed in a traditional ceremony in Langley in August 2013, before it was transported to Vancouver to be unveiled at the Tribute to Survivors on Education Day of the TRC National Event on September 19, 2013. The canoe was displayed in the Learning Place over the following three days, offering thousands of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people the opportunity to view it, touch it and "read" the stories in each tile.

The overwhelming message was healing. Without exception, visitors would gently run their hands over the tiles, many expressing the incredible feeling of warmth, calm, and healing that they found in the presence of the canoe.

The canoe was transferred to the museum at the U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, where it is on exhibit along with *Speaking to Memory*, a photo exhibit by Beverley Brown documenting her childhood experiences in residential school.

The journey of this extraordinary canoe, the healing it brings, and the reconciliation it fosters will all continue.



Thousands attend Truth and Reconciliation National Event



Beginning with the lighting of the sacred fire on September 18, 2013 and ending five days later with thousands of people doing the Walk for Reconciliation through the pouring rain, few could have predicted how deeply they would be touched by the Truth and Reconciliation National Event.

The sixth of seven major events mandated by the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, it was held at the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in Vancouver and included testimony from survivors and their family members, reflections by honorary witnesses, film screenings, church listening circles, expressions of reconciliation, and much more. In preparation for this event the TRC held hearings in Port Hardy, Campbell River, Port Alberni, Duncan (Cowichan), Victoria, Prince George, Williams Lake, Kamloops, and Terrace.

On Education Day, more than 5,000 BC students participated in this once-

in-a-lifetime learning experience. Along with their teachers and school support staff, they learned the truth about residential schools first-hand from survivors and their families. Just as importantly, they also learned why reconciliation, long overdue, must begin now.

In a special ceremony, the BCTF's work on the *Project of Heart* was showcased and our canoe, beautifully inlaid with colourful tiles decorated by BC students, was proudly unveiled. Some students later were excited to find the tiles they had decorated on the canoe.

The BCTF dedicated \$100,000 to enable teachers from throughout the province to travel to Vancouver to attend Education Day.

"Teachers are committed to teaching the true history of residential schools and commemorating the lives of the thousands of Aboriginal children who suffered abuse and even died

as a result of the residential school experience," said Jim Iker, BCTF President. "These teachers will be able to return home to work within their communities to build new relationships and pass on their knowledge to help other teachers and students address this tragic chapter in Canadian history."

DID YOU KNOW?

The logo of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a circle of seven flames, each representing one of the seven sacred teachings: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. The BC National Event was dedicated to the sacred teaching of honesty.



Teachers' reflections

At the All Nations Canoe Gathering... I was strongly affected watching canoes swiftly moving by, their paddling often accompanied by singing. I tried to imagine a time centuries ago when such canoes often came great distances through perilous conditions. It's impossible not to feel that something profoundly important has almost disappeared.

—Jack MacDermot,
Vancouver teacher, BCTF staff

My students learned that there are only two key things needed for the healing process to become truly successful and that is a genuinely compassionate mutual understanding of the destruction caused by the IRS and the constant and purposeful use of the most important virtue of all—respect.

—John Rowland,
Begbie Elementary School, Vancouver

As a non-Aboriginal first-generation Canadian, let me say now that this week has taught me that I must be an ally to my students, and learn to repair and transform the institutions that stand around us.

—Annie Ohana,
LA Matheson Secondary School, Surrey

I'd say I am at the truth stage of my own truth and reconciliation process as far as understanding my privilege as a white colonial settler and recognizing my responsibility to infuse Aboriginal content within my own practice.

—Mary Berg,
Learning Assistance teacher, Kelowna

When I returned home, I thought I would get up and go to work just like every other Monday morning. This was not the case. After speaking with fellow colleagues and recapping my experience, I realize that I am not the person I was when I left.

—Ilona Weiss,
District Aboriginal Culture teacher,
Smithers

Landmark TRC report points the way forward



Justice Murray Sinclair walks with his family



Commissioner Dr. Marie Wilson



Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild



June 2, 2015 will go down in Canadian history as the day when, for once and for all, the record was set straight and the truth about Indian residential schools was told across the land. The terrible truth is that the goals of the residential school system amounted to nothing less than “cultural genocide.” But truth’s essential partner, reconciliation, cannot be accomplished by a report, no matter how detailed or how powerfully written. Achieving true reconciliation will be an ongoing task for the Canadian people, a crucial part of our history yet to unfold.

On that landmark day, Justice Murray Sinclair and fellow commissioners, Chief Wilton Littlechild and Dr. Marie Wilson,

spoke eloquently of their six-year journey into the past, into the hearts and memories of those whose childhood was forever marked by the residential school experience. To write their report, *Honoring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, they collected 6,740 statements from witnesses and recorded 1,355 hours of testimony. Their work resulted in a 382-page summary report with 94 calls to action. When published in full, the report will eventually span six volumes.

The report was officially presented at a ceremony in Ottawa which took place during four days of events attended by thousands of survivors, family members, officials, teachers, students, and concerned citizens.

tuberculosis and influenza to flourish. The health conditions were “nothing less than criminal.”

Indigenous children and families resisted

Both children and parents found strategies to resist residential schooling. For students, the most common form of resistance was to run away, a risky option especially in winter. Some parents refused to enrol their children, or to return runaways to the schools. They called upon government to increase funding and to establish day schools in their communities so the children would not have to go so far from home. In at least 37 cases, students attempted to bring their residential schooling to an end by burning down their schools.

Children were subjected to all kinds of abuse

Children who misbehaved or attempted to escape the schools faced harsh discipline by methods that would never have been tolerated in non-Aboriginal schools. Children were strapped, beaten, kicked, and incarcerated—often for days without food. They were made to endure public humiliations such as having their heads shaved. Worst of all, rampant sexual

abuse was often covered up when children summoned the courage to report on their offenders.

The death toll was in the thousands

At least 6,000 Aboriginal children died while in the residential school system. That figure is the most accurate estimate to date, but the true death toll is surely much higher and is expected to rise as more research is conducted and new evidence revealed. Many children are still missing and many unmarked graves have recently been discovered.

The legacy of residential schools is felt to this day

The loss of language and culture, on top of the systematic rupture of family and community life over 150 years created many intergenerational consequences. The large gaps between Aboriginal people and other Canadians in terms of education, health, and socio-economic status are part of the legacy of residential schools, as are the large number of Aboriginal children apprehended by child welfare agencies and the disproportionate rate of incarceration of Aboriginal people.

The challenge of reconciliation is for all Canadians

The first steps toward reconciliation began in the 1980s with apologies from some of the churches that ran residential schools. It continued with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the court recognition of the validity of the survivors’ stories, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, and the federal government’s apology in 2008. But the next steps are up to us.

“The report states: “That process of healing and reconciliation must continue. The ultimate objective must be to transform our country and restore mutual respect between peoples and nations.”



Key findings

Canada committed cultural genocide

The policies of aggressive assimilation and forcible removal of Indigenous children from their homes and families were motivated by a desire to “kill the Indian in the child” in order to so severely weaken the First Nations that colonial settlers and Christian churches could more readily take over their lands and resources.

“The evidence is mounting that the government did try to eliminate the culture and language of Indigenous people for well over a hundred years. And they did it by forcibly removing

children from their families and placing them within institutions that were cultural indoctrination centres,” Justice Sinclair told the CBC.

“I think as commissioners we have concluded that cultural genocide is probably the best description of what went on here. But more importantly, if anybody tried to do this today, they would easily be subject to prosecution under the genocide convention.”

Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin of the Supreme Court of Canada agreed. In a keynote speech delivered May 28, 2015, she also stated that Canada

attempted to commit “cultural genocide” against Indigenous people. She is the highest ranking Canadian official to use the term publicly.

Conditions in the schools were appalling

Because Indigenous children were believed to be of low intelligence, their educational opportunities were limited to mere rote memorization. Underfunding of the residential schools meant food rations were meagre and tasteless, leaving children constantly hungry. Overcrowded and unsanitary conditions allowed infectious diseases such as

Students and teachers create “heart gardens” for survivors

Intergenerational healing begins

The day after the Truth and Reconciliation report was released, over 350 children from the Ottawa-Gatineau area gathered at Rideau Hall to greet Governor General David Johnston, Truth and Reconciliation commissioners Justice Murray Sinclair, Dr. Marie Wilson, and Chief Wilton Littlechild, many residential school survivors, and other guests invited to celebrate the important work of reconciliation launched by the TRC.

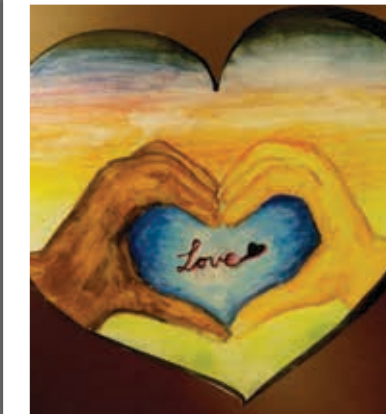
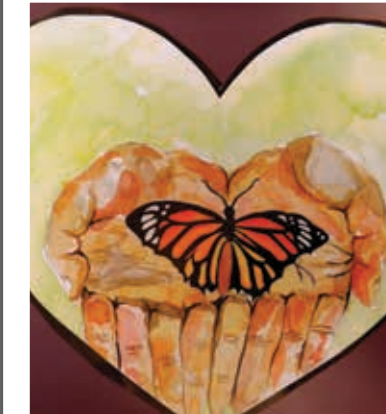
The event was organized by three TRC partner organizations that have a strong history of working together to educate Canadians about the history and legacy of residential schools: Project of Heart, the First Nations Caring Society, and Kairos Canada.

Each child carried two hearts mounted on gardening stakes: one to plant in a “heart garden” at Rideau Hall and another to plant with a survivor at the formal closing of the TRC. All of the hearts were beautifully decorated with artworks and moving words created by students from BC and across Canada.

Following a brief ceremony, members of a youth choir performed, young Inuit throat singers shared their songs, Métis jiggers danced, and an Aboriginal boy drummed and sang an honour song. Then in a procession the children and survivors planted 1,000 hearts all along the garden pathway. Finally, they led the procession away from Rideau Hall in a symbolic gesture to show that children will lead us to a future of reconciliation.



Colleen Devlin



Colleen Devlin

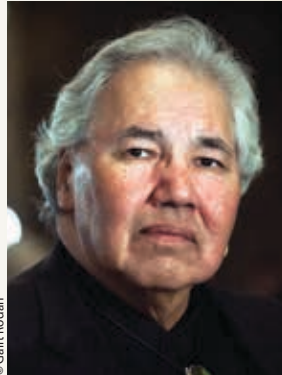


Colleen Devlin



Where to from here?

Public education has an important role in reconciliation



Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation....

The commission has visited hundreds of communities and heard thousands of statements. In almost every community where non-Aboriginal persons have been in the audience, someone, sometimes several people, have come up to me and said, "I didn't know. I really didn't know. I attended school in this province, high school, university even, and I didn't know any of this...."

Mainstream Canadians see the dysfunction of Aboriginal communities but they have no idea how that happened, what caused it, or how government contributed to that reality through such actions and policies as the

residential schools. In that environment, it becomes easy to blame Aboriginal people for their lot in life and for their failure to overcome it as others have....

The educational systems of this country bear a large share of the responsibility for the current state of affairs. But it can fix what it has broken.

What our education systems need to do is this: they must commit to teach Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children —our children—how to speak respectfully to and about each other in the future. It begins with teaching them the truth about our history. Knowing what happened will lead to understanding. Understanding leads to respect.

Reconciliation is about respect. The relationship must be founded on mutual respect, but we must not lose sight of the threshold importance of ensuring that firstly, Aboriginal children are given an opportunity to develop their self-respect. That must come first.

—Reprinted with permission from *The Manitoba Teacher*, December 2014

All British Columbians have a role to play in reconciliation



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs

It's not merely a warm, fuzzy social movement. Reconciliation will have purpose—and that purpose will be to defend Mother Earth for future generations....

I think this country and the province of British Columbia are quickly heading for the watershed moment where we're all being challenged with taking a stand on what the future will hold for our children, our grandchildren, and our grandchildren's grandchildren.

—Quoted in *The Georgia Straight*, September 22, 2013



Elder Josette and great-granddaughter Emma.



Elder Karen Gabriel and Langley students.

Online edition offers a wealth of learning resources

The BC Teachers' Federation hopes that many teachers will find this publication useful in their classrooms but, with its extensive links to a rich variety of additional resources, the online version offers an even broader and deeper learning experience. Please visit bctf.ca/HiddenHistory to access many excellent resources including videos, articles, speeches, classroom activities, and more.

Acknowledgments

Above all, we want to express heartfelt gratitude to all of the survivors who have so courageously and generously shared their personal stories with BC students and teachers through the Project of Heart.

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Finally, thanks to the teachers of BC who will use this resource to support their teaching and learning about the hidden history we share as Canadians. We hope it helps us take further steps together on the road to reconciliation.

Credits

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Opposite page: This powerful graffiti message by an anonymous artist was painted on all of the doors of St. Michael's Residential School before its demolition in 2015. One door will remain in a permanent exhibit at the U'mista Cultural centre in Alert Bay.

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The BC Teachers' Federation:
Educating for truth and reconciliation

