

# Residential Schools



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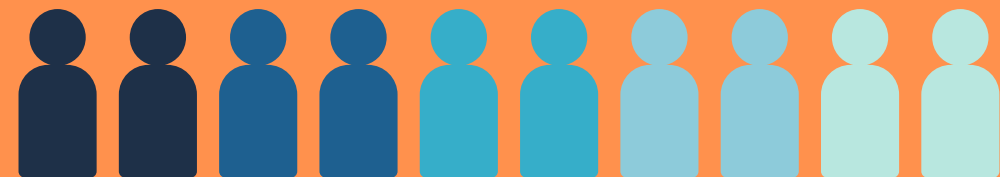
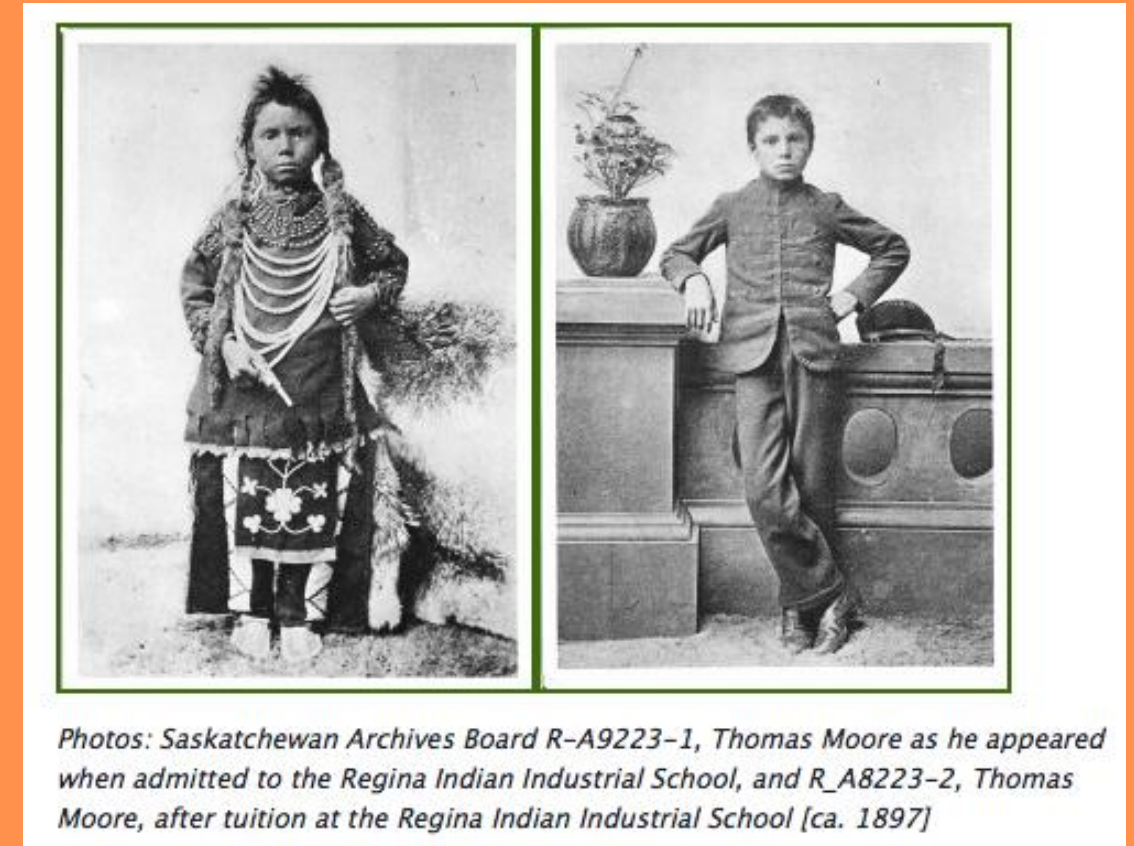
# What are residential schools?

- A residential school is school where First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to go to. These schools were usually far away from the children's homes and families. These schools were run by church organizations and the government of Canada. Over 150 thousand children went to these schools.
- The first residential school opened in 1831 in Brantford, ON.
  - it is known to the survivors as the "Mushhole" because of the horrible food or "mush" served there.
- The last band-run residential school closed in 1996 in Punnichy, Saskatchewan.
- The goal of residential schools was to **assimilate** Indigenous children.



When you assimilate you **stop**

- speaking your own language
- celebrating your own traditions
- wearing your traditional clothing
- eating traditional foods
- singing traditional songs



**Assimilation**



# Why would parents let their kids go to residential schools?



Decline of the Buffalo was making Indigenous way of life more difficult.



Indigenous parents wanted their children to be educated.



Out of fear.



They were told they had to.

**Indigenous parents did NOT have a choice. Children were forcibly taken from their homes, and parents were severely punished when they tried to intervene. They would be fined, beaten, or put in jail.**

# The Purpose of Residential Schools

- Make children leave their Indigenous culture behind
- Question what their parents taught them
- Not want to live their traditional ways
- "Take the Indian out of the child"
- Get rid of the Indian problem
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada describes the schools' primary purpose as:

**Cultural Genocide**



**Get rid of**

**Indigenous culture**

# United Nations Definition of Genocide:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

# The Métis Experience

- Most Métis communities did not have the means to build their own schools. If Métis families wanted their children to receive an education they had to attend residential schools.
- At first, Métis children were turned away from schools but were later encouraged to fill spots left by the Indian children.
- Métis children were occasionally admitted to federally funded schools as acts of charity or if their parents were willing to pay.
- The government finally decided to admit Métis children consistently to ensure that they would be assimilated into Euro-Canadian culture, if not they would be **uncivilized**.
- Many Métis families enfranchised so they would not have to send their children away.
- The schools kept poor records and the number of Métis children that attended residential schools is unknown.



# The Métis Experience

- The Métis encountered racism from both sides: they were often seen as outsiders within the student body. They were often treated as "**second-class citizens**" and had to work harder to "**earn**" their education.
- Half-breeds were a common nickname for Métis children and people. They did not belong to either group fully.
- The treatment of Métis children was dependent on their willingness to leave their First Nations' ancestors and culture behind. The adoption of religious and cultural traditions of the Euro-Canadian culture sometimes led to better treatment.



# What happened in the schools?

When the children arrived at the schools, many sad and bad things happened to them.



Their long hair and braids were cut off.



Their traditional clothing was taken away.



Their names were taken away and they were given numbers instead.



They could not speak their language.



They were separated from their brothers and sisters.



The children had to work. They often took care of the maintenance of the buildings.



They also had to clean the buildings.



Many children became very sick and were not properly taken care of.



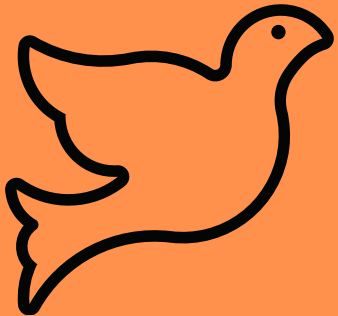
Punishment was harsh. It was often physical.



Family visits were not allowed.



Many children tried to run away.



Many children did not survive.



# What happened in the schools?

- The journey to residential schools was often extremely long, and some children came from communities that were thousands of miles away. Many survivors recall feeling like they were **walking or being shipped to a prison**.
- In some cases, diets at the schools were so poor that the malnourished students were seen as **ideal subjects** for nutritional studies.
- Students were abused for speaking their language, talking to their siblings, not speaking English properly, among many other reasons and sometimes for no reason at all.
- Separated from their parents, families and home communities, virtually every child experienced some form of **emotional neglect**.

# What happened in the schools?

- Students were extremely vulnerable - they were physically and psychologically compromised by the inadequate food, clothing, and shelter provided by the school.
- They were subject to **corporal punishment** that was sometimes so bad that **they had to be hospitalized**. The effects of abuse were so profound that some children **died from severe beatings**.
- Students suffered from feelings of acute loneliness, spiritual emptiness, and a sense of abandonment by their families. This was made worse by the need to learn a new language and the stress of living in an unsafe environment.
- Some children **took their own lives out of despair** and **others died without ever seeing their parents again**.

# Why didn't anyone do anything to stop this?

- In 1907, Dr. Peter Bryce, the Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, was sent to assess the health situation at the schools. He did not hide the horrendous conditions of these schools, and reports that the conditions were "dangerous to health".
- In 1922 he self-published a complete report on his findings and titled it "**A National Crime**".
- He requested additional funds to address the basic health concerns and was denied by Duncan Campbell Scott, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Scott took it even further and terminated the position of Medical Inspector.

# Major Impacts

- Intergenerational survivors have been indirectly affected by the residential schools because they were raised by people who were so badly abused - both physically and emotionally - and they were, at times, unable to parent their own children.
- The lack of parenting skills is one of the most profound outcomes of residential schools.
- Loss of culture.
- Loss of family connections.

# What can we do now?

- Acknowledge the truth. Talk about residential schools with your teachers, friends, and family.
- Don't judge people. Treat everyone around you with kindness and empathy. You don't know what people have experienced in their lives.
- Become an ally.
- Do your own research and educate yourself on the reality of residential schools and how they continue to affect Indigenous people across Canada and right here in Lethbridge.
- Learn about the land you live on, and the rich Indigenous culture around you. We live on Treaty 7 land.
- Read the Truth and Reconciliation Report.

## **Remeber:**

- It's normal to feel sad, confused, angry, among other emotions when learning this information.
- This information is not meant to be an attack or to put blame on any group of people. It is in the spirit of education, and truth and reconciliation. In order to move forward, we all must acknowledge the truth of Canada's dark history, and be aware of how it continues to affect people to this day.

# Educational Websites and Videos

- Legacy of Hope Foundation: <https://legacyofhope.ca/wherearethechildren/>
- Stepping Stones ATA Document: <https://www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Professional%20Development/IndigenousEducationandWalkingTogether/Pages/Resources.aspx>
- Lethbridge School Division Indigenous Education YouTube Playlist: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZjnrjerLoaMdEniFmPE-pgggtKtk5JkL3>
- Map of Residential Schools: [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/2039\\_T&R\\_map\\_nov2011\\_final.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/2039_T&R_map_nov2011_final.pdf)
- Truth and Reconciliation Report: <http://www.trc.ca/about-us/trc-findings.html>

Check our YouTube channel under the playlist "Residential school"

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZjnrjerLoaMdEniFmPE-pgggtKtk5JkL3>

# References

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2018). Stepping stones series.

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