

Tricia Logan

Tricia Logan is a Métis woman originally from Kakabeka Falls, Ontario, and she currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She recently completed her Master of Arts in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. Her thesis topic was "Métis Experiences at Residential School." Tricia is dedicated to the appropriate promotion, research, and representation of Métis history, Michif language, and truths about the residential school legacy. Since 2000, she has taught a course on the history of residential schools and is hoping to pursue a Ph.D. on the commemoration and legacy of the schools in Canada. Tricia recently took part in a Michif language program, living with Michif speakers in their homes. She currently works as a research officer at the Métis Centre of the National Aboriginal Health Organization.

Tricia's passion for Métis history is evident in the opening section of her paper as she reflects upon the challenges she faced as a researcher attempting to uncover the truth about Métis experiences in residential school. She discovered that very little documentary evidence exists with respect to Métis attendance at the schools, although the anecdotal evidence was strong, including within her own family—Tricia's grandmother and several other family members attended the Qu'Appelle Residential School in Lebret, Saskatchewan. In the paper, Tricia discusses the circumstances and policies that influenced Métis attendance at residential school and factors that contributed to a suppression of this history. She also quotes a sampling of Métis Survivors talking about their treatment in the schools.

Tricia concludes that commemoration could provide a venue for Métis Survivors to reconnect with lost memories of language, culture, and customs and to honour family members, friends, and classmates who did not survive: "Perhaps forgetting aided in the resilience, but now, in an open environment, active remembering and active forgetting will be done by choice, not necessity."

A Métis Perspective on Truth and Reconciliation Reflections of a Métis Researcher

As a student of Métis history, I have been studying the Métis experience at residential schools since early in 2000. I began my studies in Brandon, Manitoba, when I was hired as a project coordinator of one of the first Aboriginal Healing Foundation projects for Métis in Canada. At that time I was asked to compile a record of Métis attendance in the Southwest Region of the Manitoba Métis Federation. I faced a great deal of skepticism about the topic. Many respected people that I asked knew little about where to find records of Métis attendance, although they were aware of an existing oral history of Métis and residential schools. Even though finding evidence and contacting Survivors was initially difficult, most people were quite certain Métis did attend despite incomplete and inaccurate records.

My grandmother and several members of her Métis family attended the Qu'Appelle Residential School in Saskatchewan. Considering this personal connection, it was slightly discouraging when academics and entire organizations refused to contribute to the study or suggested that I find a new topic. There seemed to be a general acceptance, in some small circles of academia, that Métis attendance was insignificant despite Métis claims to the contrary. Reliance on written records preserved by residential school administrators contributed greatly to the Métis story being under-represented and under-researched for so long.

As a Métis researcher, I have gained my own perspective on Métis attendance at residential schools. A great deal of this paper was compiled with the help from Métis Elders, Survivors, academics, and friends who supported this study.

During the summer of 2007, I spent one month in Camperville, Manitoba, participating in a language immersion project learning the Michif language from Elders in the community. My Michif instructors and members of their families had attended the residential school in Pine Creek and the day school in Camperville. The influence of the residential school era is quite evident in this region. Generations of First Nations and Métis from the Camperville, Pine Creek, and Duck Bay area where I was staying serve as just one example of the intergenerational impacts that extend into contemporary realities. My time in this community revealed several truths about the current reality for Métis Survivors. For example, an imposed class structure associated with residential school was mentioned several times, and divisions are still evident in the community today.

I surprised myself during my month of Michif language immersion. I had recently completed my master's thesis on Métis experiences at residential school¹ before I arrived for my immersion program, and I thought the immersion would be a nice complement to my years of Western academic study. What most surprised me was how present and raw the thoughts of residential school are in this Métis community. What I thought was a trace of history is, in reality, an experience that is vividly alive.

The legacy of the schools came up several times when Elders were questioned about why they did not teach their children the Michif language. My Métis teachers' instruction by nuns had lasting impacts on them, so much so that they felt compelled to teach their children English and to dismiss their first language, Michif. The Elders recalled how their language was suppressed and their culture belittled. It was easy for me to make connections about how a language like Michif becomes endangered. The resolve of my teachers as well as many other Métis people was still stronger than the influence of the nuns. Many Métis resisted losing their Michif, continuing to speak and teach the language today.

What I learned in my years of studying residential schools was never so meaningful as it was when I was trying to learn an endangered language from some strong, resilient Métis women. I spent many days on the shores of Lake Winnipegosis learning Michif and the Métis way of life. On the shore of the lake, where I would swim daily and take my language lessons, were two benches. One of my Michif teachers would sit on a bench and yell out to me in Michif while I swam in the lake. We would go over the day's new Michif words while I floated by her bench on the shore.

I learned later that these benches were originally pews from the residential school in Pine Creek-Camperville. The time I had devoted to reclaiming Michif language and learning about Métis history was spent on a bench that once stood in a residential school. The benches were placed where the shore was picturesque, open, shaded, free and always surrounded with Michif language and stories. I often thought of where the bench-pews would have sat years ago. I felt that those who were forced to sit on them while at the school probably longed to see their lake, Lake Winnipegosis, as I was doing so leisurely. Instead, the children sat in a place where they were forbidden to be free, forbidden to speak, and removed from the homes of their parents and families. I could only speculate on what the children's wishes could have been during the hours of prayer spent on those benches.

Métis stories will be new to many, and many unheard stories will finally be heard. The fact that attendance of Métis students at the schools was

overlooked for so long sends a message to the Métis that remembrance of their lives is of no consequence to overall Canadian societal memory. In fact, remembering Métis experiences at residential school does have a bearing on society's collective conscience.

The Métis believe they are entitled to rights equitably with other Aboriginal people. They also feel there is a great deal of injustice to be rectified. Métis involvement in residential schools is only one injustice that is deserving of recognition and reparations by church and state. The Métis have a long intergenerational legacy of trauma. What they deserve is equitable treatment and, most importantly, to be remembered.

In the following pages I present an overview of Métis history and experience with the residential school system based on a combination of historical and archival research, supplemented by personal interviews with Métis Elders and Survivors.

Métis History and Residential Schools

The Métis are one of three Aboriginal peoples, along with Indians (First Nations) and Inuit, who are recognized in the *Constitution Act 1982* as having Aboriginal rights. However, there are few clear definitions of who is included in the Métis population or what entitlements are attached to their Aboriginal status. Historically, both federal and provincial governments have denied responsibility for Métis-specific policy and services, such as protecting occupancy of lands or providing education.

The Métis people originated primarily from unions of First Nations women and European fur traders. Gradually, communities with distinct Métis culture emerged, combining the dual streams of their heritage in unique ways and engaging in economic partnerships with Europeans. The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* records the following:

Using their knowledge of European and Aboriginal languages, their family connections and their wilderness skills, they helped to extend non-Aboriginal contacts deep into the North American interior...[a]s interpreters, diplomats, guides, couriers, freighters, traders and suppliers [of essential goods].²

People and communities in eastern Canada identify as Métis, but the majority reside in the west, from northwestern Ontario across the Prairies and into British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. This paper focuses on the experience of Métis who were most involved in residential schools, in the western region that is called the homeland of the Métis Nation.

Métis identity is not based on genetics. What distinguishes Métis is their attachment to culture and communities that are distinctly Métis, rooted

in a historic lifestyle that involved seasonal hunting, periodic return to fixed trading bases, and mobile art forms of song, dance, fiddle music, and decorative clothing. A central component of Métis distinctiveness is the Michif language that blends components of French and Aboriginal languages in a unique way.³

The determination of Métis people to maintain a land base and pursue a distinct way of life in the face of colonial encroachment periodically generated open conflict. In 1815–16 at Seven Oaks, a location along the Red River in what is now part of Manitoba, the Métis under the leadership of Cuthbert Grant, along with First Nation allies, prevailed against an armed colonial force led by Governor Semple. The Battle of Seven Oaks is usually cited as a beginning of Métis nationhood. Following Confederation, Louis Riel led the Métis in a provisional government that created a list of rights for the Métis that would later be incorporated in the *Manitoba Act* of 1870. These actions by Riel and the Métis helped procure rights to land for the Métis and created the province of Manitoba. Similar actions were attempted around Batoche in 1885, to help assert the rights of the Métis in what would become the province of Saskatchewan. In 1885, the Canadian militia was called in to forcibly settle the problems with the Métis. The Canadian government saw the Métis as a problem in many ways, but mainly as massive opposition to their settlement plans and an impediment to progress in creating the Canadian Pacific Railway.⁴ The Métis were defeated, and Louis Riel was hanged in 1885.⁵

Although Louis Riel was hanged for treason, he continued to be regarded by the Métis as a patriot and a father of Confederation.⁶ If Riel were to be pardoned posthumously by the Government of Canada, many Métis would consider this a significant gesture. The act could potentially make current land and rights disputes between government and the Métis proceed more efficiently.⁷

The *Manitoba Act* of 1870, given constitutional status in 1871, promised 1.4 million acres of land to Métis children, to be distributed as land entitlements called scrip. Dispute over the terms of distribution, allotments that did not fit with the occupancy patterns of the Métis, sharp dealing by unscrupulous land agents, and outright corruption by government officials deprived most Métis of the benefits of the constitutional provision.⁸

After the events of 1870 and 1885, the Métis were rapidly dispossessed of their land base in the west. The distribution of scrip was regarded by government as having dealt with Métis rights to land and having discharged any related government obligations, although the Métis continue to contest this position. Stripped of land, money, and basic citizenship rights they entered a period called *the forgotten years*. They were cast as “rebels” and the “other” Aboriginal

people, often left as a footnote in Aboriginal histories, without the entitlements and protections afforded by the treaties to First Nations.⁹

Two branches of the Métis population emerged historically. The “country-born” were children of Anglo-Saxon employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Those who remained near trading posts for a good part of the year had some access to formal education on an ad hoc basis, and a few became successful professionals. The Red River Métis, children of French traders, extended their influence to the north and the west, hunting and travelling extensively, with fewer opportunities for education. Neither civil nor religious authorities showed much interest in the education of the Métis, although following the Battle of Seven Oaks the governor of the Red River colony invited the Roman Catholic Church to set up missions among the Plains Métis.¹⁰

Métis attendance and discharge from residential schools was not regulated in the same way as First Nations students’ attendance. Mandatory and forcible attendance at residential school was a condition for First Nations students but it was not always so for the Métis.¹¹ The Métis fell between the jurisdictions of federal and provincial governments and were subject to inconsistent and disorganized policies. At the same time, Métis parents had a level of self-determination in deciding whether their children would attend residential schools.

Factors Influencing Métis Attendance at Residential School

The Métis presented two types of problems for colonial society. Because of the history of conflict they were seen as a threat to peaceful settlement, and they existed in a grey area in which neither the provincial governments of the western provinces nor the federal government wanted to provide services such as education.

Churches and government officials in the field made the argument that it was in the interests of the Dominion to admit Métis children to Indian residential schools. A letter to Indian Affairs in 1911 stated:

it is the duty of the Provincial Governments to provide education for Half-breeds... for the proper up-bringing of the unfortunate class of children... What is to keep them from becoming outcasts and menaces to society if they be not taken into Indian schools—schools established and maintained, be it remembered, not for the mere purpose of fulfilling the conditions of Indian treaties, but in the interest of the commonwealth.¹²

A Métis informant reported to this researcher that the Métis who were turned away from federal-run residential schools for being *too white* were often turned away from provincial schools for being *too Indian*.¹³ The extent

of exclusion that Métis experienced is indicated in the report of Alberta's Ewing Commission in 1936, which indicated that eighty per cent of Métis children in the province had no schooling at all.¹⁴ Debate continued throughout the history of residential schools about whether Métis children should be admitted, what criteria should be applied, and who would pay their tuition.

The enrolment of Métis children in residential schools would depend on a combination of their own self-determination and church and government policy. Per capita funding of residential schools made it advantageous for school administrators to admit Métis students when numbers of First Nations students were low, to move them from one school to another to adjust enrolments, or to exclude them altogether.

Per capita funding provided by the Department of Indian Affairs meant that schools with more children would receive more funding. Métis children were used to manipulate this per capita system and secure more funding for schools with low attendance. Métis children were the first to be removed or added to attendance lists in order for churches to increase their schools' attendance and therefore access more funding from the federal government. Some schools were faced with the possibility of closure due to low attendance. One school often faced with closure was the Washakada School in Elkhorn, Manitoba. To keep the school open, church officials moved students from the Qu'Appelle School in Lebret, Saskatchewan, to Elkhorn. In 1924, Indian Commissioner W. Graham wrote:

I worked hard and got every child out of the Qu'Appelle School, who had no right to be there... if it is decided by the Department, that we should admit half breeds living as Indians, off the Reserves; and if this is the class of persons you want to admit to our schools, I can fill the Elkhorn School in three weeks.¹⁵

Due to the manipulation of attendance numbers and the strict administration of per capita funds payable on behalf of First Nations children only, many of the records that exist on attendance and discharge from schools are unreliable. Inaccurate record keeping and restriction of public access to records has influenced the perception of Métis attendance at residential schools overall.

As requests for Métis enrolment from communities and churches started to multiply in the early 1900s, the federal government tried to regulate the costs involved with allowing Métis attendance. The Department of Indian Affairs created a social-class hierarchy based on the predetermined stereotypes about First Nations and Métis. The class system would identify the target groups that the government would be willing to spend federal funds on.

Residential school officials from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta agreed on the following class-based system:

Halfbreeds may be grouped into three fairly well-defined classes:

1. Those who live, in varying degrees of conditions, the ordinary settled life of the country.
2. Those who live, in varying degrees, the Indian mode of life.
3. Those who—and they form the most unfortunate class in the community—are the illegitimate offspring of Indian women, and of whom white men are not the begetters.¹⁶

Those of the first class make no claim upon the Government of the Dominion for the education of their children; nor has any such claim as far as the knowledge of the undersigned goes been made on their behalf. The third class are entitled to participate in the benefits of the Indian schools... As to the second class of Halfbreed the undersigned at once admit that they present a difficult educational problem, but the very difficulty effects a strong reason against drawing a hard and fast line such as it is drawn. This second class of Halfbreeds may be divided into three groups:

1. Those who live apart from Indians but follow a somewhat Indian mode of life
2. Those who live in the vicinity of Indian Reserves
3. [Those who] [l]ive on the Reserves¹⁷

In arguing for admission of Métis students, school officials pointed out that

such schools were established not to meet treaty obligations towards Indians, but as a means of preventing, in the public interest, a race of wild men growing up whose hands would be against all men and all men's hands against them.¹⁸

If the government or churches perceived Métis children as living an “Indian mode” of life, as savages or as un-Christianized, they were more likely to take the children into the residential schools.

The Roman Catholic Church was particularly influential in Métis involvement in residential schools. Some schools opened in predominately Métis communities because of the early missionary history of the Roman Catholic Church in that area. Fort Ellice and Camperville, Manitoba, Lebret and Isle a la Crosse, Saskatchewan, and St. Paul's, Alberta, have centuries of Métis history and Roman Catholic missions and were also home to some of the largest residential schools where Métis attendance was high. Métis families who were closely tied to Roman Catholicism often requested that their children be taken to a Roman Catholic school, but Métis were not accustomed to the severity and aggressiveness of socialization that was practised in the schools. The influence of religious denomination drew Métis students to the schools, but it also led to mistrust of the church and resistance against church relationships. A student at a church-run day school remembered morning catechism:

We had to go to catechism on the reserve, at the residential school we had to walk, we had to go in the morning, every morning. Before communion, you got to go about two or three months before you can go to communion, 'cause you're a pagan baby you know.¹⁹

Residential schooling was, in some cases, the only option available if Métis parents wanted their children to attend school. Conversely, school administrators and Indian agents charged with populating the schools would take children who they deemed to be “living an Indian mode of life” into the schools regardless of their identification as First Nations or Métis. Within a certain geographic area, First Nations and Métis children would be taken to the schools primarily due to their location in relation to the school. Métis received little or no funding for attending residential school, so transportation was their own responsibility. Schools would be filled with First Nations students who were transported hundreds of kilometres from their homes, but the Métis were usually limited to attending schools that were in close proximity to them.

While distance often made students long more for home, geographic location stood as a small barrier for those students who were determined to escape. Emotional and intellectual coercion had a far greater impact on keeping students in the schools, and location did not work for student retention as much as was hoped.

The Department of Indian Affairs, which regulated attendance policies, would sometimes allow Métis attendance on request. While some of the churches that administered the schools would manipulate government attendance policies, others adhered to the government restrictions. Church-department correspondence indicates that some churches applied to the Indian agents and/or the Department directly to request Métis attendance. Many of the requests were made on behalf of Métis families who had prior communication or relationships with the churches that ran the schools. Some arrangements were made to the mutual benefit of the school and the Métis:

the Department will not object... to their attending the schools, provided their parents will, as suggested by the Agent deliver a few loads of wood at the school for the winter.²⁰

Evidence of a long-term understanding between churches and the Métis can be seen in the flexibility that was allowed to the Métis in their attendance at residential school. First Nations women who lost their status by marrying either a non-Aboriginal or a Métis man might be eligible in some time periods for treaty annuities. In some cases the churches could draw on treaty money or family allowance cheques to subsidize the children's attendance at the schools.²¹

Perceptions about race and physical appearance influenced Métis attendance at residential school. In correspondence from Indian agents who evaluated students at the schools, racial characteristics were often considered. In a letter from Lytton Industrial School, the subject line read “Re: Admission to Halfbreeds into Industrial Schools,” and the body of the letter included the following description:

There are difficulties in this matter—I had two boys in school – one grey eyes – hair lighter than Indians in texture and colour—very fair skin—the other Indian in all appearances—both of the same mother—the same father, acknowledged with.²²

Characterizations that were unimportant to the Métis were used arbitrarily by government and churches to make decisions on whether or not they would admit certain students.

Nuns and priests at each school viewed both First Nations and the Métis as the “pagan babies”²³ and considered their own role in the schools as an obligation to save these “savages and heathens.” In close contact with the Métis communities and First Nation reserves, churches were keen to help “save” the Métis as well as First Nations. A letter from the Bishop of Keewatin, written in 1917, asked about the admission of Métis to residential schools:

I want to ask you if, in this Northern part of the Northwest where Indians are bound to remain in their reserve and are living side by side with the Halfbreeds in the wilds, the children of those Halfbreeds can be admitted in Indian Boarding Schools.²⁴

While the government was willing to provide the Métis with a badly administered system of land and money scrip in recognition of their Aboriginal rights, few other services were offered to the Métis. The one consistent feature of government policy was the objective to save money. Métis attendance was discouraged through funding rules under the per capita system, which specifically stated that “No names other than those of Indian children are to be included in this Return.”²⁵ The importance of submitting returns to the Department of Indian Affairs was emphasized by another rule set by the Department: “No teacher’s salary will be paid until this Return has been received by the Department.”²⁶

The Residential School and Child Welfare System Connection

In addition to the impact of residential schooling itself, another practice had an impact on Métis families and communities. There are numerous connections between the residential school system and the child welfare system. Reconciliation for the Métis would mean a considerable effort being made to investigate these connections and the overall child welfare system, past and present. Michif Elder Rita Flamand worked closely with

Métis children and helped repatriate children who were removed from their families in what became known as the Sixties Scoop:

That's the time when they started picking up kids later on, when the lake started to dry up and there was no fish in the lake, the people were starting to have a real hard time in the community and that's when they took the kids. They should have helped the parents to keep the kids... they just took the kids and didn't help the people.²⁷

Métis Elders interviewed about residential school experiences ask why a similar study on the impacts of the child welfare system is not being conducted. For the Métis and other Aboriginal people in Canada, the child welfare system was another publicly supported and administered way of assimilating their children. The widespread practice of removing children from their Métis families and placing them in white, middle-class foster and adoptive homes was ideologically an extension of the residential school model, perpetuating the false image of the unfit Métis parent. The provincial child welfare system mutated into a state-sanctioned transfer of children from one group to another group:

The white social worker, following hard on the heels of the missionary, the priest and the Indian agent, was convinced that the only hope for the salvation of the Indian people lay in the removal of their children.²⁸

Métis families have been negatively altered by federal, provincial, and church policies created in the name of "child care." The prevailing doctrine that external agencies had authority over the care of Métis children existed for over a century and did what many consider irreparable damage to Métis families and communities. Geoffrey York, in his book *The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada*, comments on the removal of thousands of children during the 1960s and 1970s and their placement with non-Aboriginal adoptive parents and foster families:

During these two decades child welfare agencies sent Indian and Métis children from Manitoba and other provinces to the homes of white middle-class couples in Canada and the United States, on the assumption that these couples would make better parents than low-income families on Indian reserves and in Métis communities. Years later, it became obvious that the policy was a failure.²⁹

Creation of a "Half-breed" Class Structure

Métis people's cultural identity and economic system was derived during the early to mid-1800s from hunting and liaison with fur trade companies. Métis identity cannot be reduced to one firm concept; rather, it is a fluid process that allowed the Métis to optimize their economic and social potential. Métis identity evolved with each challenge that it faced. The core of the identity never changed, but the perception of that identity progressed to fit new

parameters that the Métis were offered. Their core remained at all times distinctly Métis with a culture and language that was always greater than the sum of its original parts, always more than just a “half” of anything. During the growth of Métis identity in the West, Métis themselves created their own social system based on the buffalo hunt, trading, and entrepreneurship.

Canada's racist rearrangement of Métis social structures is still reverberating in Métis communities today. Categorization according to criteria of blood quantum or environment as perceived by residential school administrators, Indian agents, clergy, and non-Aboriginal community members created divisions that persist today.

The nuns, they segregated us, you might as well say... from the better Métis to the poor Métis. Well, the nuns always had respect for the Moms and Dads that they knew.³⁰

Métis students had memories of the children with money being treated differently than those who lived off the land. Those Métis who were perceived as living the country mode of life were treated differently than those who were living an Indian mode of life. Proximity to a First Nations reserve, farm, farm co-op, road allowance, or to the bush determined how external agencies (schools or child welfare) would see a child's environment. These early class distinctions were used by the residential schools and were carried over into different government programs.

The role of the Indian agents in these various Department of Indian Affairs agencies in determining a class structure influenced the Métis even though they were not directly impacted by the *Indian Act* itself. Agents were charged with conducting follow-up reports on former residential school students; female students were reported as doing well if they were married to a white man and doing poorly if they were married to a Métis man. If former students, First Nations or Métis, returned to their homes or to the bush after graduation, they were also considered as doing poorly.³¹

The class distinctions created by Indian Affairs carried over to how the Métis and First Nations saw themselves. They were taught to judge themselves and one another by these value-laden characteristics, thus internalizing oppression. Coming from Métis communities and large families, Métis children originally had little or no concept of Western class distinctions, definitions of poverty, or racism. Entering residential school often meant that they were learning about non-Aboriginal Canada for the first time and, at the same time, they were learning what non-Aboriginal Canada thought about them. The most common statement made by Métis residential school Survivors is: “We were outsiders.”³²

Too white to be considered eligible for Aboriginal rights and too brown to be treated as full Canadian citizens, the Métis were always slipping through the cracks. Being considered outsiders at residential school was simply a reflection of how dominant Canada perceived Métis people. Métis children were singled out by teachers and ridiculed by First Nations classmates for being half-breeds. Entering residential school meant entering an atmosphere of gender segregation, racial persecution, and constant ridicule. One Métis Survivor stated:

The nuns told us, you know, Indians were bad. Now why would they be telling us Indians were bad? It doesn't matter how tiny bit of Indian or white or whatever; they shouldn't say one nationality is so bad, why? We were little Indian kids, us Métis. They called us half-breeds. I hate that word but who are they to say. I felt bad about that when they called us half-breeds... When you do something wrong they call you nothing but an f'ing half-breed.³³

Métis children learned exactly what being a half-breed meant in the eyes of school personnel. One Métis Survivor remembered how hard it was:

It was very hard to be there with Sisters always after you... calling me "*sauvage*" which meant "savage" in French or "*le chien*" that meant "dog." That's what they used to call us when we didn't listen. I knew what it was because my mom and dad spoke French and the other kids didn't know what it was; they didn't know the French language.³⁴

Métis children learned at a young age just what being a dog, a "breed," a "mutt," or a half-breed really meant to non-Métis. All students had daily reinforcement of the inhumanity that came with church-led illusions of superiority by being spoken to, fed, and disciplined as dogs. Michif Elder Grace Zoldy pointed out the students' perspective on the abuse in the schools:

We never said anything 'cause we thought it was normal. We thought it was normal in the white system. We didn't know they were coming here to use us and abuse us in any way possible. We didn't know that. Our parents didn't know that.³⁵

Common Experience Payments

Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada recently started delivering common experience payments to recognized residential school Survivors in Canada. Media attention has focused on these payments and the rest of the compensation package. It is hoped that the truth and reconciliation process will play a role in educating Canadians about the real impact of residential schooling on Survivors. It is encouraging to know that the residential school legacy need not remain in the collective Canadian memory only as the origin of monetary payouts.

Métis are included in the common experience payments according to section 14.01 of the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*.³⁶ There are barriers that some Métis people fear will keep them from being included in the common experience payment, denying their eligibility for the compensation packages. One barrier is the list of schools that are considered residential schools under the *Agreement*. Several schools considered residential schools by the former students are not listed in the *Settlement Agreement*. Schools can be added to the list of schools in Schedule F of the *Agreement*, but the schools must be defined as residential schools according to Section 12.01, which reads:

- a) The child was placed in a residence away from the family home by or under the authority of Canada for the purposes of education; and,
- b) Canada was jointly or solely responsible for the operation of the residence and care of the children resident there.³⁷

As previously outlined, many Métis were enrolled according to the location of the schools. Métis were more likely to attend schools if they were close to home and especially if the schools were associated with the already-established Roman Catholic missions in their communities. Métis attended the schools and were subjected to the same treatment as the other students, but the Métis did not have to stay at the schools since the schools were built in their home communities. As some of these schools are and were considered “day schools” only, even though they were administered by the same clergy and agencies, they are not included in the current *Settlement Agreement*. Métis Survivors who attended day schools or some residential schools as day students feel that they are entitled to the compensation package, but Métis former students are likely to be left out because of the criteria for defining which schools are included in the settlement.

The seemingly perpetual grey area that influenced Métis attendance while they were in the schools continues to impact how their claims are addressed today. Métis attendance was inconsistent due to changing policies, and Métis attendance over the entire residential school era was relatively low. Data assembled by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada estimated that of 105,000 to 107,000 former students alive in 1991, eighty per cent were registered Indians, nine per cent were Métis, six per cent were non-status Indians, and five per cent were Inuit.³⁸ Even though the Métis and Inuit represent a small percentage of former students still alive, the manner in which they are currently represented in resolution provisions is not representative of the number that did attend. Fewer Métis attended the schools, but in many cases there is no record at all of those who did attend.

In order to address the Métis experience, the role that provinces played in residential schools and the child welfare system needs to be acknowledged.

In order to get a complete picture of how Métis children were handled, links between the federal government, churches, and provincial governments need to be traced. There are too many similarities and patterns of aggressive assimilation between the three main administrators that impacted the Métis to overlook the connections between them.

Commemoration and Forced Forgetting

The effort to instill new languages, new culture, and Euro-Canadian world views into young Aboriginal minds worked simultaneously with cultural annihilation. At the same time that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to learn new ways of knowing, they were also forced to forget and banish all of their old ways. Students were forced into forgetting and, as adults, it is something that still troubles them. Reclaiming language, traditions, knowledge, customs, culture, and family memories is attempted by many, if not most, Survivors. Annihilation of memories of their physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental homeland was something even those Survivors with the most positive memories of residential school experienced.

Potentially, commemoration will take place in coordination with the truth and reconciliation process, and it could help to provide a supportive venue for Survivors' remembering. In addition, truth and reconciliation events will provide critical recognition of the role that Canada and the churches played. The act of informing bystander Canadians of a long-held secret will aid in reconciliation. Education and regaining lost memories of language, culture, and customs will help rebuild pride and resilience in those who were forced to forget. Some of what they were forced to forget were the children who died during their time at the schools.

Frequent questions and requests for information from residential school Survivors concern the children who passed away at the schools. Some children died from disease, neglect, and abuse; others who died after attempts to run away were used by the school administrators as so-called examples, essentially saying, "This is what happens when you misbehave." Many Survivors remember funerals being used as lessons. There is a collective longing among former students who lost family members, friends, and classmates at residential school to resolve the trauma of loss and to honour those who passed away. Métis students join their First Nations and Inuit classmates in requesting cemetery records and death certificates.

It is often said that Métis, and all Survivors, are resilient. Perhaps forgetting aided in the resilience, but now, in an open environment, active remembering and active forgetting will be done by choice, not necessity.

Notes

- 1 Logan, T.E. (2007). *We Were Outsiders: The Métis and Residential Schools* (M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba).
- 2 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] (1996:199–200). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 4: Perspectives and Realities*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- 3 RCAP (1996).
- 4 Shore, Fred (2001). “The Emergence of the Métis Nation in Manitoba”. In L. Barkwell, L. Dorion and D. Prefontaine. Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications: 76–77.
- 5 Shore (2001).
- 6 RCAP (1996).
- 7 Friesen, J.W. and Friesen V.L. (2004). *We are Included: The Métis People of Canada Realize Riel’s Vision*. Calgary, AB: Detselig.
- 8 RCAP (1996).
- 9 Logan, T.E. (2006). *Lost Generations: The Silent Métis of the Residential School System: Revised Interim Report*. In L.N. Chartrand, T.E. Logan, and J.D. Daniels, *Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation: 57–93.
- 10 Chartrand, L.N. (2006). *Métis Residential School Participation: A Literature Review*. In L.N. Chartrand, T.E. Logan, and J.D. Daniels, *Métis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation: 5–55.
- 11 Milloy, J.S. (1999). *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System - 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press.
- 12 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter dated 9 November 1911 to the secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa from “an obedient servant,” [signature obscured], Winnipeg. RG 10, File 150-9, Vol. 6031.
- 13 Bourassa, Madeleine (2004). Personal communication, Lebret, Saskatchewan, November 2004.
- 14 Government of Alberta (1936:7). *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Investigate the Conditions of the Half-Breed Population of Alberta*. Edmonton, AB: Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, 1936). Cited in RCAP (1996:435). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3: Gathering Strength*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.
- 15 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter from Indian Commissioner W. Graham dated 17 April 1924.
- 16 It is not clear in the record whether “illegitimate” simply meant that “begetters” were not established as Indians who could pass on entitlement to treaty annuities. Although they were identified as half-breeds, this did not appear to be an impediment to being enrolled in residential schools.
- 17 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter from Emile J. (St. Albert), Adilard (St. Boniface), Olivier Elizard (Regina), Emile Grouard (Athabaska). RG 10, vol. 6039, file 160-1, part 1.
- 18 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter from Emile J. (St. Albert), Adilard (St. Boniface), Olivier Elizard (Regina), Emile Grouard (Athabaska).
- 19 Zoldy, Grace (2007). Personal communication, Camperville, Manitoba, 9 November 2007.
- 20 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter from Deputy Superintendent General dated 25 April 1904. RG 10, Vol 6031, File 150-9, Part 1.
- 21 Logan, Helen (2004). Personal communication, Regina, Saskatchewan, November 2004.

- 22 Letter dated 7 February 1911 as cited in Shore, Fred J. and Lawrence J. Barkwell (eds.) (1997). *Past reflects the present: the Métis Elders' Conference*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Métis Federation.
- 23 Zoldy (2007).
- 24 Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Letter dated 19 February 1917 from O. Charlebois, Bishop of Keewatin, The Pas, Manitoba. RG 10, vol. 6031, file 150-9, part 1.
- 25 Saskatchewan Archives Board. Education File, Add 2, File 48, Ed. Add 2, 48.
- 26 Saskatchewan Archives Board. Education File, Add 2, File 48, Ed. Add 2, 48.
- 27 Flamand, Rita (2007). Personal Communication, Camperville, Manitoba, 9 November 2007.
- 28 Fournier, S. and E. Crey (1997:84). *Stolen From Our Embrace: The Abduction of First Nations Children and the Restoration of Aboriginal Communities*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre.
- 29 York, G. (1990:202). *The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada*. Toronto, ON: McArthur & Company Publishing Limited.
- 30 Zoldy (2007).
- 31 Examples of follow-up reporting can be found in Provincial Archives of Manitoba. Indian Affairs. School Files, RG 10, Volume 6032, File 150-14, part 2.
- 32 Blondeau, Tillie (2000). Personal communication, Lebreton, Saskatchewan, April, 2000.
- 33 Anonymous cited in Daniels, J. (2004:58-59). *Métis Memories of Residential School*. Edmonton, AB: Métis Nation of Alberta.
- 34 Anonymous cited in Daniels (2004:111).
- 35 Zoldy (2007).
- 36 Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (2006). *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement*. Retrieved on 10 January 2008 from: http://www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/english/pdf/Indian_Residential_Schools_Settlement_Agreement.PDF
- 37 Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (2006:63).
- 38 Castellano, M. Brant (2006). *Final Report of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Volume I: A Healing Journey: Reclaiming Wellness*. Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.



Two Métis children standing next to an Inuit child (centre) at the Anglican-run All Saints Residential School, Shingle Point, Yukon, ca. 1930

Photographer: J.F. Moran

Library and Archives Canada, PA-102086

(This photo can also be found, along with many other resources, at www.wherearethechildren.ca)

