

FIRST THINGS FIRST

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA

May 2014

THE REGINA INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL AND THE REV. MCLEOD

Residential schooling in Canada, of which industrial schools were an integral part for many years, is unquestionably a bleak chapter in our nation's history.

Following the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June 2008 many former students - "survivors" - have come forth to tell appalling stories of the physical, sexual and cultural abuses they suffered at the hands of their mentors, and of the debilitating after-effects with which many are still dealing. We pray that the regional and national events the TRC held over the past four years for survivors will have in some ways helped many to feel more reaffirmed as human beings.

It may seem inappropriate, indeed insensitive, to raise this point but it is unlikely that all schools in the residential system were inherently bad places or that none of the students benefited educationally from their experiences. How did the Regina Industrial School fare in this regard?

Several historians who have written about the school consistently assign it a poor or failing grade. Their assessments -- not without good reason -- are based almost exclusively though on the troubled years of the school's history, particularly those under its second principal, the Rev. AJ Sinclair (1901-1905), and pay only scant attention to the more promising years under its first and longest-serving principal, the Rev. AJ McLeod (1891-1900).

Attempts to find a somewhat more balanced perspective, therefore, may be warranted.

Industrial schooling had two primary purposes: to "civilize and Christianize" Aboriginal youth

and to provide them with training in various gender-specific vocational roles. To achieve these outcomes the school day was divided in half. Mornings were devoted to classroom instruction in basic school subjects with special emphasis on English and the teaching of Christian practices and precepts. Afternoons were devoted to instruction outside the classroom in various occupations including agriculture, carpentry, painting, shoe/harness-making, type-setting for boys, and domestic or home-making skills for girls.

Several aspects of the school's life and its management under the Rev. McLeod seem to set his years as principal somewhat apart from those of his two successors.

Attendance at the school, for example, grew steadily from 32 in 1891, the year the school opened, to a 122 by 1897 as compared with a steadily declining attendance to well below 100 in the years following McLeod's death in 1900. His efforts to visit numerous reserves and meet with parents over their concerns about sending their children to a distant and unfamiliar institution, as well as to write monthly letters to other parents, evidently paid off.

Under McLeod's watch the fiscal management of the school was stellar when measured against the mismanagement and mounting deficits during the Sinclair years. By 1904, the deficit had in fact exceeded \$12,000 triggering an independent audit of the school's operation. McLeod's close attention to the balance sheet had been consistently praised by departmental inspectors, as had his diligence in keeping the school building (which housed classrooms, a dining hall, boys and girls dormitories) clean, bright and ventilated, and in ensuring the students were fed balanced and nutritious meals.

As an indication perhaps of his better understanding of youth, McLeod liberalized the rules regarding the separation of genders that many industrial and residential schools rigorously upheld. At the Regina school all the morning classes (though not the afternoon industrial classes) were co-educational; boys and girls ate all their meals together and they were free to socialize on school grounds in the evenings. During winters, one night a week was devoted to social entertainment for students and staff that featured vocal and instrumental music, games stories, Indian club-swinging, slide shows and dancing.

During the school's earlier years lacrosse was the most popular boys sport. Both senior and junior teams distinguished themselves in friendly matches with teams in Regina (at the Qu'Appelle Industrial School, meanwhile, boys were restricted to playing cricket!). Soccer eventually overtook lacrosse in popularity while, for the girls, basketball was the favorite sport.

In other initiatives McLeod had a portion of Wascana Creek (which cut through school grounds) dammed to create a pond so students could skate and play hockey in winter. He started the practice of holding an annual school picnic day in the Qu'Appelle Valley, a result of which many students experienced their first train travel. And each year he arranged for 2 weeks of camping experience in Wetmore's Grove, a few miles along the Wascana, for those students who stayed at school over the summers.

Like all principals in the Residential school system, however, McLeod and the Regina school were complicit in the cultural abuse of students: the quashing of their native languages, customs and spiritual beliefs. To enforce the English-only requirement he appointed 9 "most trustworthy pupils" as monitors to report on their peers who lapsed into a native tongue; while daily religious teachings and observances were part of the Christianization process (although a good number of students came from reserves where Christian missions had already been established). During the 1896 school year students, according to McLeod, had memorized

31,024 verses of the Bible; and in 1898 he reported that seventy-two had joined the Presbyterian Church by profession of faith.

Sadly, and despite McLeod's best efforts to keep the school clean, disinfected, and ventilated against the spread of disease, at least 10 students had died by 1900. This would turn out to be less than half the number of student deaths over the next 10 years.

Upon learning of McLeod's sudden passing in November 1900, Indian Affairs Commissioner David Laird paid the following tribute: "I fear the school will now suffer owing to the death of its respected, whole-souled and successful principal... His place will be difficult to fill; but the school is so well organized that it ought to be comparatively easy now to carry on ..." The well-organized school left by McLeod turned out to be no match for the mismanagement and extravagant habits of his successor, the Rev. Sinclair. To be fair, however, several factors were at play in contributing to the school's ultimate demise some of which were not of Sinclair's making. Regina was not the first industrial school to close and others were to follow.

The third and last principal of the school, the somewhat reluctant though competent Rev. RB Heron, worked hard to stem declining enrolments and balance the books but the decision by Indian Affairs to close the school in 1910 was final.

In none of their annual reports, oddly, did any of the three principals mention the school's small cemetery where the McLeods' infant children, plus an undetermined number of Aboriginal students, are buried.

For an update on recent developments regarding the cemetery project please see the Mission and Outreach report by Mary Jesse in this issue of *First Things First*.

Doug Stewart
Editor

BOARD OF MANAGERS

At their last meeting, the Board of Managers approved \$12,000 worth of repairs for the sanctuary roof to be completed this spring. This will fix all the trouble spots and prevent future damage. We are also working on a plan to have the rest of the roofing work done. If you have questions about what is being completed please speak with Rodolfo.

Donna Wilkinson,
Board of Managers, Convenor

MISSION & OUTREACH

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the special appeal recently to help Elijah Ngor's relatives in South Sudan. The response was overwhelming. In just two weeks we raised more than the \$4000 we needed.

For those of you who weren't able to be in church recently, Elijah's brother was killed in the South Sudan civil war, leaving a family of nine.

The country is extremely dangerous right now so the family is trying to reach a refugee camp in neighbouring Ethiopia where they will be safer. It is not an easy journey. Funds raised will help with transportation costs and with food during their travels. We will share information as we receive it.

Cemetery Commemoration Project:

Session has endorsed the participation of First Presbyterian in this ecumenical and community project regarding the abandoned cemetery at the former Regina Indian Industrial School. Several developments have occurred in April as follows:

- City of Regina's Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee met to consider possible actions the city might take regarding this site. Our group made a presentation, as did the Chief of Carry- the-Kettle First Nation.

This meeting received quite a bit of media coverage, both local and national (CBC's As It Happens). The Heritage Committee

has tabled this topic until September to give time for further consultation.

- We have contacted most of the 45 First Nations communities whose children attended the school to share the children's names and inform them of the cemetery.
- We are giving talks and presentations at churches and other community venues to raise awareness and share information. The next public presentation will be at the Regina Public Library central branch on Tuesday, May 6 at 7 pm. Everyone is welcome.

An early goal is to bring First Nations representatives to a gathering in Regina in June. The event will include time at the cemetery followed by discussion about how the cemetery should be commemorated. Churches will provide lunch, supper and overnight billets as needed.

Sunday May 25:

The morning service will be one of healing and reconciliation. The cemetery project is one concrete way our congregation can be active in mending relationships with our Aboriginal neighbours. Remembering in worship our need for reconciliation is another.

Mary Jesse
Mission & Outreach Convenor

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Faith is the belief in things not seen and since we have not seen any evidence of spring as of this writing we are going on faith that it will eventually happen. So ... the Fellowship Committee is planning a Spring Fling Potluck Supper on May 25, 2014 at 5:30pm. Plan to attend for a delicious meal, a visit with friends and a chance to share some of your summer plans. Signup sheets are available in the narthex and downstairs in the gym. We just need to know the number attending, so that we can set up enough tables. So bring your favourite dish and join us.

Sheila Wilson
Fellowship Committee Convenor

ADULT WALK

The snow and slippery streets are finally gone (we hope!), so Adult Walk has come to an end for the season. Thanks to all the participants! Watch for us to begin again in the fall.

Bob Wilson

ART FROM THE MORRIS ROOM

This month's painting is "A Helping Hand" by the French painter Emile Renouf (1845-1894).

It is an intimate portrait of an old fisherman and his daughter. The whole painting is a study in contrasts, from the size of the principal characters down to their wooden shoes. Note their hands, fisherman's garb to frill dress and apron.

Note too the father's obvious pleasure and the daughter's serious intent to help; also the paraphernalia of a coastal French fishing boat, part of a sail and a pole with ropes; and the seaman's rubber coat and hat.

Little is known of the artist's early life. In 1886 he visited New York City and painted a picture of the Brooklyn Bridge, somewhat uncharacteristic as he mostly painted landscapes, marine views and French peasants.

Renouf was a contemporary of Jean Francois Millet, also a painter of French peasants.

This work was given to Larry and Elizabeth Kitson by their niece, Beth Ernst.

John Macfarlane

MAY EVENTS

11	10:30 AM	Worship Service & Sunday School
13	10:30 AM Noon	Bible Study Freedom 55ers
15	7:30 PM	Choir
18	10:30 AM	Worship Service & Sunday School
19	Victoria Day - Office Closed	
22	7:30 PM	Choir
25	10:30 AM	Worship Service & Sunday School
	5:30 PM	Spring Fling Potluck
27	10:30 AM Noon	Bible Study Freedom 55ers
29	7:30 PM	Choir