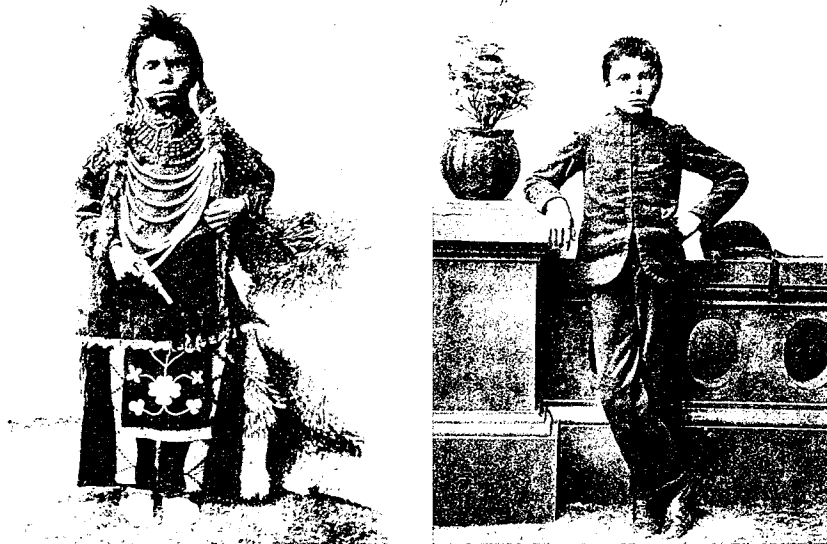


Punishment + Abuse



Saskatchewan Archives Board R-A8223 (1)-(2)

These photographs are examples of staged “before and after” photos taken by government officials. Here, Thomas Moore, a young indigenous boy who attended Regina Industrial School, is portrayed with short hair and Western-style clothing. Officials and missionaries created such propaganda so that they could adopt it as evidence of the radical, “beneficial” changes the schools brought about in their students.

Gordon's Indian Residence is an Anglican Institution. When I attended there, students were confirmed when they reached age 13.¹⁷ It was a really big deal. Everyone was confirmed.

I attended school at the Gordon's residence from 1959–1964. I was nine years old when I started there. Every year a big bus would come to pick us up at the reserve and take us to the school. It took over three hours to get to Gordon's from the James Smith Reserve. It was a long way from home. I was a very little girl. I got very lonesome.

Every once in a while students would run away, trying to get home. They would travel at night, helping themselves to vegetables and fruit from gardens along the way. One time we even took a pony from a farmer's yard and rode it for several nights trying to get home. We hardly ever made it home, we were usually caught. And then we were punished.

Punishment for running away varied. One boy was hauled up in front of all the assembled students by the principal. He had a reputation for being mean. He forced the boy to pull his pants down and gave the boy 10–15 straps with a great big leather strap. Girls often had their head shaved bald if they tried to run away so that

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everyone would know. It was awful. I felt very ashamed. We also had to scrub the stairs with a toothbrush.¹⁸

When students who could not take the separation from their parents and the harsh environment ran away from the school and were caught by the school staff or the Indian agents, they often received strappings or were struck with the "cat-o-nine tails," a whip with a cotton cord and nine knotted thongs, commonly used for punishment by the British navy and army.¹⁹ For offences such as running away, students also received hours of isolation in dark closets, boiler rooms, or abandoned areas of the school.

Even common childhood accidents like bed-wetting were punished harshly. Lorna, who was at the Mohawk Institute from 1940 to 1945, describes the "shock treatments" the girls would receive, regardless of whether they had actually wet their beds.

They used to give us shock treatments for bed-wetting. A lot of us never wet our beds but we still had to do it anyway. They said it worked for the girls but it didn't work for the boys. They couldn't really ever find out why, but I think it was because of the sexual abuse that went on there. . . . They used to bring in a battery—a motor of some sort or some kind of gadget, and he'd put the girl's hand on it and it would jerk us and it would go all the way through us from end to end—it would travel. And we would do that about three times.²⁰

At the Alberni School on Vancouver Island, which was in operation from 1892 to 1973 under the United Church, punishments were particularly harsh, and treatment of the children was often brutal. A staff member in 1961 and 1962, Marian MacFarlane, was fired for attempting to rescue a young child from a severe beating.

The local dentists were given free Novocaine by the government for the Native kids, but the traditional practice after the war years was for them to hoard the Novocaine for their practice in Port Alberni and just work on the Indians without painkillers. Everyone in the school knew about this and condoned it, from the principal on down. No one minded when Indians were hurt, naturally; they were being beaten every day.

To give you an example of the prevailing mentality towards Indians, I once caught a matron beating a little girl with a piano leg. She was just murdering that kid, who was maybe six years old, and she would have killed her if I hadn't have grabbed the matron and socked her one. So off the matron goes to complain to John Andrews, the principal. That would have been in 1962. You know what Andrews did? He fired me for hitting the matron! And you know what he said? 'I couldn't let the matron go because she plays the organ on Sundays. Anything she did to that little squaw would

have been better than us losing our organist.' Well, that shows you what we were dealing with: the lives of the Indian kids were completely expendable. They were considered less than human, almost like a disease we had to get rid of.²¹

Connection QUESTIONS

1. What do these stories about punishment reveal about the attitudes of school officials toward their students? Why do you think that physical punishment was so common? What do you think school officials were trying to achieve with the physical punishments? At what point does punishment become abuse?
2. How does Marian MacFarlane explain why the dentists did not give painkillers to the indigenous students? What is represented by such acts? As you read the different accounts from the students in this reading, what insights do you get about what it might have been like for a student at one of the Indian Residential Schools? What adjectives do the students use to describe their experiences?
3. How do you explain the principal's reaction to MacFarlane's attempt to stop the matron from beating the student? What message was sent by firing MacFarlane instead of the matron? What do you wish the principal had done?

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- 13 In 1914, the Mohawk Institute was sued and fined after Nelles Ashton, the principal, imprisoned for three days two girls who had escaped from the school. The girls received only water for sustenance. See Elizabeth Graham, ed., *The Mush Hole: Life at Two Indian Residential Schools* (Ontario: Heflle Publishing, 1997), 110.
 - 14 For a selection of elders' testimonies regarding the importance of hair in Native American and indigenous cultures, see <http://www.whitewolfpack.com/2013/08/elders-talk-about-significance-of-long.html> (accessed May 12, 2015).
 - 15 Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole: Life at Two Indian Residential Schools*, 23.
 - 16 For painful testimonies on this topic, see Garnet Angecone, "Garnet's Journey: From Residential School to Reconciliation," accessed February 26, 2015, <http://garnetsjourney.com/chapters/residential-school/>.
 - 17 Confirmation is a Christian rite in which a young member of the church affirms his or her faith. It marks the fact that the person is mature, understands the teaching, and can become a full member.
 - 18 Geraldine Sanderson, "Running Away," Residential Schools website, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://allaboutresidentialschools.weebly.com/personal-stories.html>.
 - 19 Understanding Slavery Initiative website, http://www.understandingslavery.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=532:cat-online-tails&Itemid=255.
 - 20 Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole: Life at Two Indian Residential Schools*, 378.
 - 21 Marian MacFarlane, testimony at Simon Fraser University Harbour Centre forum, Vancouver, BC, February 9, 1998.

READING

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