

Paul's Reserve [White Whale Lake] [Wabamun], AB – Indian Day School Narrative

In 1891 or 1892, a reserve was surveyed for the Paul's Band with White Whale Lake and Bad Lake forming part of the boundaries.¹ Soon after, a Day School was planned by Methodist Church.² By 1893, "a very good school-house" was in operation under the missionary, Reverend C. E. Somerset, who taught at the school until a teacher was hired.³ An 1894 inspection of the Day School on Paul's Reserve indicated there were 38 school age children and described the school building as roomy and well lit.⁴ Methodist services were held every week in schoolhouse.⁵

Progress at the Day School was described as "highly satisfactory" and reflecting "great credit on the teacher," Mr. W. G. Blewett, who held a third-class teaching certificate. At the school, special attention was given to industries like carpentry, knitting, sewing, spinning, laundry work and gardening. Tools were given to the school by the Department of Indian Affairs and were "made excellent use of" as many of the boys were considered experts at making "ox-collars, axe-handles, hay-fork handles, wheel-barrows, etc." The Indian agent also commented that "as is not often the case with day-schools, the children will speak English to you out of school hours."⁶

By 1898, attendance at the Day School was declining as a number of children from the reserve were sent to the Industrial School at Red Deer, where the former missionary, Reverend C. E. Somerset, was now the principal.⁷ By the next year, the school was closed due to low attendance.⁸ The Day School remained closed until 1903 when it opened briefly, but was soon shuttered again when Mrs. Hopkins, the teacher, died that winter.⁹ It appears that there was much sickness on the reserve as the doctor visited regularly in response to "the usual tubercular maladies."¹⁰

¹ Jas. Gibbons, Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jul. 12, 1900, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1900, p. 158.

² Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1892. [page and author unknown]

³ Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1893. [page and author unknown]

⁴ Alex. McGibbon, Inspector of Indian Agencies and Reserves to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Oct. 8, 1894, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1894, p. 174.

⁵ Chas. De Cazes, Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jun. 30, 1897, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1897, p. 152.

⁶ Chas. De Cazes, Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jun. 30, 1896, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1896, p. 178.

⁷ A. E. Lake, Acting Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jun. 30, 1898, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1898, p. 146.

⁸ Jas. Gibbons, Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jun. 30, 1899, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1899, pp. 151-2.

⁹ Jas. Gibbons, Indian Agent to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Jul. 27, 1904, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1904, p. 157

¹⁰ Jas. Gibbons, Indian Agent to Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Aug. 9, 1906, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1906, p. 170.

An Indian agent's report from 1907 suggests that the Day School had been closed for some time since more children were being sent to the Residential School at Red Deer. For Gibbons, this was a positive development: ... "from Paul's as from the other reserves the day school has disappeared, the Indian being capable, apparently, of grasping the superiority of the residential school [...] hope for the future lies in their declared intention of taking up farming again."¹¹

Although Church officials warned the band that the Day School would be permanently closed if attendance did not improve, student numbers continued to dwindle as more children were sent to Red Deer. In December 1908, officials recommended that the school be closed. Part of the blame for the closure was directed at the Department, as expressed in a letter to A. Sutherland who was General Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society:

The Indians are not antagonistic to the school; they would like to send their children but with Government rations cut off and farming operations carried on as they are at present they must hunt for a living, and this takes them and their children away from the reserve.¹²

The Day School was open again from 1918 to 1922 with only a handful of students under the teacher, Fred J. Dodson. Additional research is needed to determine if the Methodists ever reopened the Day School.

Timeline

1893: Methodist Church establishes a Day School with a schoolhouse soon after the creation of Paul's Reserve near White Whale Lake.

1898: Attendance at the Day School begins to decline as more children from Paul's Reserve are sent to the Industrial School at Red Deer.

1899-1903: Day School closed due to low attendance.

1907: Day School closes again after operating for several years.

1918: Day School reopens with very low attendance before closing again in 1922.

¹¹ Jas. Gibbons, Indian Agent to Frank Pedley, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Apr. 11, 1907, Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) annual report, 1907, pp. 166-7.

¹² C. F. Hopkins to Rev. A. Sutherland, Dec. 11, 1908, accession 1978.092C, box 7, file 140, UCCA.