

# INDIAN AGENTS AND THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IN CANADA, 1946-1970<sup>1</sup>

*Vic Satzewich  
Linda Mahood*

At a 1939 conference entitled "The North American Indian Today" and organized jointly by the University of Toronto and Yale University, D.J. Allan, the Superintendent of Lands and Trusts for the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, stated that "a good [Indian] Agent is their [i.e., Indian peoples'] guide, philosopher and friend."<sup>2</sup> This view of the Indian Agent as a benevolent patriarch contrasts sharply with that held by Basil Johnston, who was a student, also in 1939, at a residential school in northern Ontario. Johnston remembers the Indian Agent who took him to the school in the following way:

[He said] "Where do you think you are going? Didn't I tell you not to move?" And I was shoved and pushed back to my chair. "Now! Don't you move. Do you understand?" The [Indian] agent wagged a finger in front of my nose for emphasis before he withdrew. Though I could not see him I was certain that he kept an eye on us through the narrow crevices from below, above and behind.<sup>3</sup>

Today, few would disagree with the characterization of the Indian Agent offered by Johnston. Fewer yet would hazard support for Allan's clearly ideologically based portrayal of the Indian Agent as the kindly mentor of Indian people. As Johnston's anecdote indicates, Indian Agents tend to be regarded conventionally as petty tyrants who ruled over mini-fiefdoms and who were bent on destroying the spirit and initiative of Indian people. While not necessarily incorrect, the view that Indian Agents were all-powerful individuals who were

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  2. D.J. Allan, "Indian Land Problems in Canada," in *The North American Indian Today*, eds. C.T. Loram and T.F. McIlwraith (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1943), 187.
  3. Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1988), 20-21.

unquestioningly able to impose their will, and that of the state, on Indian communities does need to be rethought.

There are two main difficulties with this conception of the unidirectional nature of power relations in the context of the analysis of the position of Indian Agent. First, this conception denies both the possibility and reality of Indian peoples' resistance. Historical evidence suggests that Indian people have not been passive victims in the colonization process. Even though there were real differences in the powers possessed by Indian people and state authorities, it is equally true that Indian people have engaged in various forms of resistance to state policies and practices. During the early part of this century, for example, resistance included efforts to become politically organized in order to press for land claims and treaty rights, and surreptitiously engaging in outlawed traditional cultural and religious practices.<sup>4</sup> Second, this view of the nature of the position of Indian Agent is silent on the complex power relations among non-Indians who had an interest in Indian land, labour power, education, and souls. The interests that non-Indians had in those matters were not homogeneous. In carrying out their duties Indian Agents not only had to take into account the interests and resistance of Indian people, but also the varied interests of different social classes, corporate entities, municipalities, and church and missionary organizations.

In the history of the administration of Indian communities there were many sites at which the interests of the church and state were complimentary. Those interests, however, also diverged at various points. One of the most significant points of divergence between the church and state was in the context of the decline of the residential school system following the Second World War. Arguably, one of the most significant changes in Indian Affairs policy and practice<sup>5</sup> following the war was in the sphere of the education of Indian children. While certain missionaries<sup>6</sup> and Indian Affairs officials had doubts about residential schools

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4. B. Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 94-109, 162-83.
  5. For nearly sixty years following Confederation, Indian Affairs was a separate government department, albeit under the Minister of the Interior. Between 1936 and 1949, Indian Affairs was a branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. In 1949, Indian Affairs was transferred to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. In 1965, the Indian Affairs Branch was merged with the Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources to create the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; V. Satzewich and T. Wotherspoon, *First Nations: Race, Class and Gender Relations* (Toronto: Nelson, 1993), 37. This paper uses the term "Indian Affairs Branch" without particular reference to its institutional home.
  6. According to D. Nock, in *A Victorian Missionary and Canadian Indian Policy: Cultural Synthesis vs Cultural Replacement* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), some missionaries had begun to question the wisdom of residential schools in the late nineteenth century. In particular, he attributes authorship of "The

even as they were being put in place in the late nineteenth century, it was only in 1951 that the Indian Affairs Branch began to question publicly the wisdom of, and rationale behind, the residential school system. Indeed, the revised Indian Act of 1951 pointed to the beginning of a new educational policy which saw Indian Affairs explicitly turn away from residential schooling in favour of a policy which placed Indian children into either newly constructed or previously established federally operated reserve-based day schools, or into integrated provincial schools. The post-war period, then, marked the beginning of the breakdown of the largely co-operative, and mutually beneficial, historical relationship between church and state in the regulation, administration, and control of Indian people and communities.

Despite the central place that both Indian Agents/Agency Superintendents<sup>7</sup> and the residential schools<sup>8</sup> played in the process of colonization, little is known about the specific role of Indian Agents in the residential school system, and about

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Fair Play Papers" to E.F. Wilson, a missionary with the English Church Missionary Society. The "Fair Play Papers" consisted of a series of four articles published under a pseudonym in the Canadian Indian Research and Aid Societies journal, *The Canadian Indian*, in 1891. The articles rejected, in Nock's terms, "much of the paternalism typical of missionary and government treatment of Indians in Canada at this time and later" (135).

7. When we refer to the period before 1947, we use the term Indian Agent; when we refer to the period after 1947, we use the term Indian Agency Superintendent even though they remained known more colloquially as "Indian Agents" until the 1960s.
8. Most readers are now familiar with the policy background of residential schools, and what the church and state hoped to accomplish in them. See Titley, *A Narrow Vision*; J. Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). We also know a considerable amount about how both the stated and not-so-hidden curriculum were organized. See T. Wotherspoon, "Indian Control or Controlling Indians," in *Hitting the Books: The Politics of Educational Retrenchment*, ed. T. Wotherspoon (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1991), 261; Nock, *A Victorian Missionary*; and how Indian students and parents resisted the regime of the schools: C. Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Tillacum, 1989); K. Abel, "Of Two Minds: Dene Response to the Mackenzie Missions, 1858-1902," in *Interpreting Canada's North*, eds. K. Coates and W. Morrison (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1989). We also are beginning to know more about the consequences for children and families of the residential school system. See L. Jaine, "Industrial and Residential School Administration: The Attempt to Undermine Indigenous Self-Determination," *Journal of Indigenous Studies* 2 (1991): 37-48. Others, while not discounting these negative aspects of the system, also point to the fact that the residential schools have created a generation of Indian leaders who are now, ironically, in the forefront of struggles for self-government. See J. Miller, "The Irony of Residential Schooling," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 14 (1987): 3-14.

the nature of the relationship between Indian Agents and missionaries in that system. The aim of this article is to examine, within the context of the breakdown between church and state, the role of the Indian Agency Superintendents in policing abusive conditions in the residential schools, and their role in the transition from residential schools to day and integrated provincial schools. It suggests that Indian Agents had considerably less power in the residential school system than traditionally has been attributed to them, and that one of the constraints that affected how they carried out their duties was the entrenched missionary presence in reserve communities.

In the first part of this article we present a brief discussion of the historical background of residential schools. We then discuss the methodology and sources of data for this study. The third part of the article examines the formal responsibilities of Agency Superintendents in the residential schools as outlined in the *Indian Affairs Field Manual* and the constraints that the missionary presence placed on how Indian Agents carried out their duties. We then go on to examine the relationship between missionaries and Indian Agency Superintendents in the policing of abusive conditions in schools. Finally, we analyze the relationships among Indian Agency Superintendents and missionaries, Indian parents, and local school boards within the context of the transition from residential schools to integrated provincial schools and federally operated day schools. The article concludes with a discussion of the need to rethink the nature of the historical role of Indian Agents/Agency Superintendents within the system of colonial domination.

### **Residential Schools: The Historical Background**

Despite changes in rhetoric, over the years education has historically been defined by the federal government as the chief means by which Indian children were to be socialized into becoming Christian, English-speaking workers, farmers, and homemakers.<sup>9</sup> What became known as the "residential school system" in 1923<sup>10</sup> had its origins in a report on industrial schooling for Indian children in the United States written by Nicholas Flood Davin. In 1879, Davin was commissioned by the Canadian federal government to evaluate the system of industrial

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9. B. Titley, "Industrial Education for Manitoba Natives: The Case of Rupert's Land Indian School," in *Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba: From the Construction of the Common School to the Politics of Voices*, ed. R. Bruno-Jofre (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 373.

10. Note that the term "residential school" only began to be used by the federal government in 1923 when the distinction between "boarding" and "industrial" schools was eliminated. See J. Redford, "Attendance at Indian Residential Schools in British Columbia, 1890-1920," *BC Studies* 44 (1979-80): 41.

schooling for Indian children in America. By 1883-84, the Canadian government accepted many of Davin's recommendations and began to pursue a policy of augmenting its already existing system of day schools with boarding and industrial schools.<sup>11</sup> Davin recommended that boarding and industrial schools be operated as much as possible by missionaries, subject to federal regulation and regular inspection. While some federal officials expressed concern that this would leave religious authorities with too much power and influence within Indian communities, others, including Sir John A. Macdonald, embraced the report and its recommendations.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, by the late nineteenth century, there were basically three types of schools for Indian children: day schools, boarding schools, and industrial schools.<sup>13</sup> Day schools were operated both by the federal government and in some cases by missionaries. While somewhat blurred even at the time,<sup>14</sup> the initial distinction between boarding and industrial schools was that the former tended to be located on or near reserves, while the latter usually were located some distance from reserves and closer to centres of white settlement. The latter also offered a mixture of academic and practical instruction to girls and boys.<sup>15</sup> As noted above, it was only in 1923 that the term "residential school" was used to describe the latter two types of schools.

From the Canadian state's perspective, there were three main advantages of a state-financed but church-operated residential school system. First, the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations were given *per capita* grants for the education of Indian children in their schools. The grants were to be used for the daily maintenance of the buildings, the feeding and clothing of children, and the payment of teachers. Having missionaries operate the residential schools was consistent with the more general concern over economy that was one of the guiding principles of departmental operations.<sup>16</sup> The Department felt it would be cheaper to sub-contract residential schooling to missionary organizations than to operate residential schools itself. Second, such a system would isolate Indian children from what missionaries and government officials saw as the retrograde influence of the family and community. In an effort to create what some sociologists refer to as a "total institution,"<sup>17</sup> it was felt that the most

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11. Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 77.

12. Satzewich and Wotherspoon, *First Nations*, 120.

13. *Ibid.*

14. In British Columbia's McKenna-McBride Commission reports, there is no consistent distinction made between the different types of schools either by representatives of the Department of Indian Affairs or by Indian people. The authors would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper for this insight.

15. Titley, "Industrial Education," 373-74.

16. Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 77.

17. See Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients*

effective means of re-socializing and assimilating Indian children would be in isolation from family and community. Third, such a system also took advantage of missionary experience and labour that already had been expended in the education of Indian children before Indian Affairs had begun to intervene actively in Indian communities. Many of the missionary organizations also could draw upon time-honoured systems of incarceration discipline and techniques of indoctrination which had been tested in the convents and juvenile reformatories of Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The advantage of this arrangement for missionaries was that it provided them with a regular source of revenue that subsidized their organizational activities.<sup>19</sup> It also entrenched their institutional status and legitimacy in Indian communities. According to Grant, this arrangement helped give "visibility and weight" to the missionary presence and helped bring Indian children within the range of missionary influence.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the mutual benefits of this arrangement, the relationship between church and state was not devoid of conflict. There was some grumbling on both sides about who benefited the most from this relationship.<sup>21</sup> Missionaries complained that the *per capita* grants did not cover the full cost of operating residential schools and accordingly they engaged in regular struggles to increase the amounts allocated for schooling.<sup>22</sup> Over time, the concerns articulated earlier by some of Macdonald's cabinet colleagues became a reality. The division of labour between church and state instituted in relation to residential schools did give the church a basis for influence within Indian communities that sometimes worked against the interests of the state. Churches tended to regard the schools as their own private domains and frequently resented the intervention of Indian Affairs into what they regarded as their territory. While they were supportive of, and happy to see, the state implement legislation in 1920 which forced Indian children to attend school,<sup>23</sup> the churches' position in relation to the internal organization and

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*and Other Inmates* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961).

18. Titley, "Industrial Education," 373; see also L. Mahood, *The Child Savers* (London: University College London Press, forthcoming).
19. Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 76.
20. Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 235-36.
21. *Ibid.*, 195.
22. One of the consequences of underfunding of residential education was that missionaries needed to extract labour from Indian children in order to cover the costs of operating the residential schools. See Wotherspoon, *Hitting the Books*, for a full discussion.
23. Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 90-91. The distinction between "attending" and "enrolling" is an important one. The legislation specifically refers to "attending," and not simply "enrolling." See *An Act to Amend the Indian Act*, Statutes of Canada, 1919-20, c. 50 (10-11 Geo. V), section 10.

operation of schools was, according to Grant, "Let us handle our own Indians in our own way."<sup>24</sup>

This relationship of mutual dependence began to break down after the end of the Second World War when the Branch began to turn away from residential schooling. After nearly seventy years of operation in Canada, residential schools were falling into disfavour with some people in the Branch and within some sections of both the Indian and non-Indian communities. During the hearings of the Joint Senate and House of Commons Committee to Examine the Indian Act, which sat between 1946 and 1948, calls came from a number of quarters to put an end to the residential school system. Some Indian leaders criticized the system for its explicit attempt to undermine family and community life. Furthermore, with the defeat of fascism in Europe, segments of Canada's "white" population increasingly questioned the legitimacy of the principle of "racial" segregation upon which the residential school system was based.<sup>25</sup> State policies that were based explicitly on assumptions of the "racial" and cultural inferiority of Indian people were seen as anathema by many Canadians.<sup>26</sup>

What followed were revisions to the Indian Act and Branch policy. More emphasis was placed on "integrating" Indian people into existing social structures and institutions, which in part meant the closure of residential schools. Indian Affairs began to pursue a twofold strategy which saw Indian children placed in provincially operated schools, where they were supposed to interact on a daily basis with non-Indian children, and which also saw the increasing use of Branch-operated day schools located on reserves. In both cases, Indian children were allowed, indeed expected, to live at home and benefit from parental and community supervision and guidance.

One indication of the rapidity with which Indian Affairs turned away from residential schooling is through an examination of enrolment figures. In 1941, just over 50 percent of the 17,426 Indian children who were enrolled in school were found in residential schools. The remaining 50 percent were enrolled in day schools.<sup>27</sup> During the 1963-64 school year, however, there were approximately 55,000 Indian children enrolled in elementary and secondary school. By that time, Indian children enrolled in a residential school were clearly in the minority: 59 percent were enrolled in federal day schools, 27 percent in integrated provincial schools, and only 13 percent in residential schools.<sup>28</sup> Between 1964 and

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24. Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 198.

25. Again, it is important to emphasize that questions about residential schools were raised well before this time. See Nock, *A Victorian Missionary*.

26. See J. Barman, Y. Hébert and D. McCaskill, "The Legacy of the Past: An Overview," in *Indian Education in Canada: Volume I: The Legacy*, eds. J. Barman, Y. Hébert and D. McCaskill (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 13.

27. Satzewich and Wotherspoon, *First Nations*, 124.

28. The remaining 1 percent were enrolled in so-called hospital schools—schools

1981, over eight hundred joint schooling agreements were reached between local school Boards and the Department of Indian Affairs, and by 1987 there were only two residential schools in operation, both of which were band-operated.<sup>29</sup>

### Sources of Data and Methodological Considerations

Two types of data are used to analyze the role of the Indian Agent in the residential school system and the nature of relationship between Indian Agents and missionaries in that system. The first source of data comes from the Indian Affairs Branch *Field Manual*. In 1947 the Indian Affairs Branch issued its first *Field Manual* for Indian Agency Superintendents. The creation of a *Field Manual*, which outlined the various duties and responsibilities of the Indian Agent cum Agency Superintendent, was nearly seven years in the making. It was created, in part, to correct what Indian Affairs officials in Ottawa felt was a slow and inefficient decision making process that was breeding hostility and resentment against the Branch and its field employees.<sup>30</sup> Before the *Field Manual* was developed, Indian Agents either had to seek advice directly from the Branch in Ottawa, or rummage through old files to see if they or their predecessors had received previous instructions about an appropriate course of action. This led to long delays in decision-making for even minor issues.

The 1947 edition of the *Field Manual* consisted of a relatively modest one hundred and twenty-seven pages of guidelines on staffing, legal matters, band council meetings, welfare, veterans' re-establishment, training and schools, handicrafts, family allowances, construction and engineering, financial regulations, reserves, and trusts. The manual was revised several times and by the mid-1960s it had grown into a weighty tome over one thousand pages in length. By that time it provided detailed instructions to Superintendents on everything from mundane issues like the length and quality of drapes to be purchased for teachers' residences and the colour that bathrooms on reserve day schools were to be painted, to more substantive and significant policies regarding the issuing of social assistance on reserves. In the 1967 volume, the section on education was itself over two hundred pages long.

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located in hospitals caring for Indian children requiring long-term care. J. Frideres, *Native Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts* (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1993), 177.

29. *Ibid.*, 178; beginning in the early 1970s, bands became involved actively in the struggle for Indian control of Indian education. By 1989, nearly 40 percent of Indian students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools were enrolled in band-operated schools.
30. Indian Affairs Branch, *Field Manual* (Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch, 1947).



While the *Field Manual* provides one foundation upon which to analyze the relationship between Indian Agents, missionaries, and Indian people, a more complete understanding of the nature of the role of Indian Agent and of power relations requires others sources of data. For this reason, data from the *Field Manual* are supplemented with interviews with former Indian Agency Superintendents.

The purpose of the interviews was to acquire a better sense of the experiences of Indian Agency Superintendents as employees of a bureaucratic, hierarchical state agency that had a contradictory mandate of representation and social control in relation to its clientele. The interviews were semi-structured in that there were several thematic areas we wished to cover, but also were open enough to be able to pursue particular issues which arose in the course of the interview. Specifically, we were interested in their careers with Indian Affairs, their relationships with non-Indian people in the communities surrounding reserves, how they carried out their main duties as Agency Superintendents, and their own personal family lives during the time they were in the position.

Twenty-three interviews were conducted with former Indian Agency Superintendents who worked in western Canada between 1946 and the late 1960s. The interviewees usually held a number of positions during the course of their careers with Indian Affairs, and we were interested mainly in their tenures as Agency Superintendents. The interviews were conducted by the authors between December, 1992 and April, 1994, usually in the homes of the respondents. The subjects were contacted with the assistance of a former employee of the Department who remains active in the organization of the annual reunion of former Department of Indian Affairs employees. The individuals we interviewed had responded positively to a request which we sent by mail to sixty-one former Agency Superintendents. Fourteen of our letters were returned because of incorrect address information. We did not receive a response from twenty-three individuals, which makes for a response rate of just under 50 percent for those who we believe received our letters. The interview subjects were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and that no personal harm or embarrassment would result from their participation in this study. The individual interviews ranged from one and one-half hours to over five hours in length. The results of the interviews presented in this paper, then, constitute only a small portion of the data collected in the interviews.<sup>31</sup>

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31. Two of the interviewees were unwilling to have the interview tape-recorded. In the remainder of cases interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Before conducting the interviews, the respondents were assured that their identities would be kept confidential. Thus, we do not use proper names when we refer to particular Agency Superintendents, and we only refer to the province they worked in and the general time period. While this is perhaps unsatisfactory from the perspective of the historian who craves detail, we are obligated by SSHRC ethical guidelines to ensure that no personal harm or embarrassment comes to the respondents from participation

## Missionaries, Agency Superintendents: A Contested Division of Labour

The post-war division of labour as outlined in the *Field Manual* between missionaries and Agency Superintendents in the residential schools was relatively simple. In the case of church-run residential schools the Indian Affairs Branch paid a direct *per capita* grant to the management of the school. The money was earmarked for the pupils' food and clothing, teacher and other staff salaries, and various other expenses involved in the operation of the school.<sup>32</sup> Principals were responsible for the maintenance and operation of the physical condition of the buildings, the "morale and effectiveness of the personnel," the care and guidance of children, and the quality of instruction offered by teachers. They also were expected to be actively familiar, from personal observation, with physical conditions, personal relationships, and teaching procedures.

The responsibilities of the Agency Superintendent in relation to residential schools were

to assist in every way, the Principal of the residential school in the performance of his duties. He should co-operate with the principal in matters of repair and maintenance of the school, the attendance of children at school, and the general administration of the educational unit.

While teachers were hired by the denominations that ran the schools, the Agency Superintendent did have the power to recommend to Branch headquarters in Ottawa the dismissal of teachers if they were unsatisfactory. The Indian Agent also had the responsibility of vetting applications for admission, and had the sole authority to admit and discharge pupils from residential school.<sup>33</sup>

What appears to have been on paper a relatively straightforward and highly functional division of labour within the residential schools was actually much more complex in reality. In particular, the description in the *Field Manual* tends to mask the tensions which existed between Indian Agents and missionaries. One of the areas in which that tension was manifest was in the appointment of the Indian Agent.

Formally, the missionaries who operated residential schools on behalf of the Branch only had control over the appointment of teachers. In practice, however, missionaries seemed to have also some influence over the appointment of the Indian Agents themselves. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Roman Catholic missionaries particularly were concerned over the appointment of non-Catholics in Catholic reserve communities. According to Grant, Catholic

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in our study.

32. Indian Affairs Branch, *Field Manual* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs, 1967), 41.

33. Indian Affairs Branch, *Field Manual* (1947).

missionaries regarded the Department of Indian Affairs as an essentially Protestant organization and feared that Protestant Indian Agents in Catholic Indian communities “might lead to the use of official influence to lure Catholic Indians into Protestant schools and hospitals and to import a Protestant bias into Departmental regulations.”<sup>34</sup> Historically, the Catholic church fought hard and often to ensure that Catholic teachers, Indian Agents, and farming instructors were appointed in Catholic-dominated agencies.<sup>35</sup>

This concern over the appointment of field personnel carried on into the early post-World War Two years. Even though the initial appointment and subsequent employment of Indian Agency Superintendents was formally governed by the Civil Service Act, the Catholic church retained informal influence in the appointment, dismissal, and promotion of individuals within the Branch. In 1948, for example, one superintendent who was sent to northern Alberta to replace the Indian Agent who had been fired recalled that upon his arrival he was somewhat glibly informed by one of his junior office staff that

You won't last long because all of your predecessors since 1900 when the agency was opened had been fired. And what's more the Bishop was going to make sure undoubted see, you're not Catholic, they didn't have a hand in your appointment, you're not going to last very long.<sup>36</sup>

Another non-Catholic Agency Superintendent in British Columbia who eventually went on to occupy a senior position within Indian Affairs reported that it did not hurt his career to co-operate with representatives of the Catholic church. He suspected that his own career advancement was due, in part, to his good relations with the Catholic hierarchy.

When the Bishop came to visit the agency he'd say, “are you going to do an inspection...visiting the reserves south?” And I'd say “oh yes” and he'd say “can I come along” and I'd say “sure.” So, it would be my [airplane] charter and it wouldn't cost me anything. But he put in a good word for me when he went to Ottawa ... I'd get that feedback of, “you're doing all right” ... and the Bishop said, “you know, get the idea.”<sup>37</sup>

This same Superintendent also implied that one of his colleagues, who was believed to be well-liked by the Indian people in his Agency and who was well thought of by other Superintendents, did not get ahead in the Department because

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34. Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 186.

35. Again, see *ibid.*

36. Authors' Interview, 8 Jan. 1993. This is the Agent's paraphrase.

37. Author's Interview (a), 22 Jan. 1993. In some cases two interviews were conducted on the same day; thus the designations (a) or (b).

of his involvement with the Freemasons. "I got feedback, you know, what's this x like ... he's not like you are..."<sup>38</sup> As a member of an organization that is made up largely of white Protestant males whose anti-Catholicism is well known, being a Freemason in a "Catholic" Agency did not appear to be good for one's career.

Other Superintendents reported that in some cases of transfers, "maybe the Indians complained or particularly the churches complained."<sup>39</sup>

### **Barriers to the Effective Policing of Abuse**

Shortly before we began conducting interviews with former Indian Agency Superintendents, several cases of physical and sexual abuse in church-run boarding schools captured public attention. While much of the publicity had centred around Mount Cashel in Newfoundland, allegations were also made by Phil Fontaine and others that they had been abused in residential schools; in that context, calls had come from several quarters to establish a commission of inquiry into abuse in the residential schools.<sup>40</sup> In these circumstances, the issue of abuse constituted an important part of our interviews. We wanted to know what the role of the Indian Affairs Branch of the federal government was in the policing of conditions in the residential schools.

Nine of the twenty-three Superintendents whom we interviewed were aware of allegations of physical abuse of children enrolled in residential schools during their tenures in particular agencies; two of the nine Superintendents also were aware of allegations of sexual abuse of children enrolled in residential schools in their agencies. The other fourteen interviewees claimed no knowledge of either physical or sexual abuse. This section examines the responses by Indian Agents, senior Departmental officials, and missionaries to allegations of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools. It also examines the constraints that acted on the ability of Indian Agency Superintendents to represent effectively the interests of Indian children who were being abused in schools.<sup>41</sup>

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38. Ibid.

39. Authors' Interview, 22 Dec. 1992.

40. See "Native students consider charges against schools," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 6 Nov. 1990, A6.

41. It is important to acknowledge that this research is admittedly "one-sided" in that interviews have only been conducted with former Indian Agents. The missionaries who operated the schools were not interviewed for this research. The full history of Indian residential schools has yet to be written, and any account of that history must take into consideration the views, actions, and activities of those missionaries. For obvious legal reasons, however, it is doubtful whether personal interviews with former missionaries will provide much insight into the specific issue of abuse in residential schools.

As noted above, one of the formal duties of Indian Agency Superintendents was to "co-operate with the Principal in the general administration of the educational unit." While the Superintendents whom we interviewed for this research often were called upon to assist the Principal in helping maintain the physical conditions of buildings, they rarely were called upon, and rarely involved themselves, with the internal operation of the schools or the manner that children were being treated in the schools. Aside from attendance at the yearly Christmas pageant put on by the schoolchildren, it appears that Branch officials in Ottawa, high-ranking clergy, and the missionaries who operated the schools were uncomfortable with the Agency Superintendent taking too active an interest in the welfare of the Indian children, particularly when abuse was suspected.

The Indian Agents we interviewed who were aware of allegations of abuse developed a number of different responses to the accusations. All reported, however, that their ability to protect fully the interests of Indian children from their Agency in residential schools was constrained both by the missionaries who operated the schools and by some of their superiors in the Branch in Ottawa.

One Alberta Superintendent submitted a report to the Branch in the late 1940s on both the Anglican and Oblate-operated residential schools in his Agency. While not making specific allegations of abuse, his report "damned residential schools in general, not only Catholics, in fact they were the best, I thought. Anglican was just terrible."<sup>42</sup> He reported that one residential school in his agency contained children who came from communities over 800 miles away in British Columbia. Some children did not even return to their home communities when school finished, and "ended up moping around all summer." He recommended that residential schools be closed down and replaced with day schools (a policy which the department later adopted).

According to that Agency Superintendent, Indian Affairs response was to pass the report on to the Oblates in Ottawa, who then passed it back to the local Bishop. The Superintendent's understanding was that upon reading the report, the Bishop promptly summoned him for a meeting. Since the Superintendent expected a dressing down from the Bishop regarding his report, he was unsure as to what to do. He wrote a memo to his Regional Director asking for advice. The Regional Director "didn't know what to do. So in the end he didn't answer." Upon receiving a second telegram from the Bishop insisting on a meeting, the Superintendent telephoned the regional office "which was a sin in those days...because it cost so much." After discussing the matter with the Regional Director, the Superintendent was instructed to go and meet with the Bishop. According to the Superintendent, "it was a little tense at first but he was friendly." They ended up discussing how often the Superintendent visited the schools in the Agency, as well as a number of more general issues. The Superintendent's impression from the meeting, though, was that "as far as he [the Bishop] was concerned it would

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42. Authors' Interview, 8 Jan. 1993.

have been better if I had never gone near them [the schools]."<sup>43</sup> Following this incident, in which he had felt betrayed by his superiors in the Branch, the Superintendent remained interested in the care of the children in school but did not again challenge publicly the continued existence of residential schools.

In 1958, another respondent, who had been a social worker for Indian Affairs before he was appointed Superintendent, submitted several reports to Ottawa regarding physical abuse and corporal punishment at a particular British Columbia residential school. The Superintendent indicated that these reports were not even acknowledged by the Department, let alone acted upon.<sup>44</sup>

Several Agency Superintendents reported that church officials dealt with the issue of abuse in their own way. In commenting on a case of sexual abuse, one Superintendent who worked in a British Columbia Agency in the mid-1950s noted that

one of the brothers there fancied little boys...but they transferred him out of there. The church transferred, as soon as they got wind of it, they would transfer them out of there...<sup>45</sup>

Thus, by the time that an Indian Agency Superintendent and the wider community was made aware of allegations of abuse or mistreatment, the churches usually had sent the offending missionary to another posting.

In some cases, Agency Superintendents reported they felt constrained from taking any direct action about abusive conditions because of religious differences between themselves and the particular order that ran the residential school. The Alberta Superintendent cited above stated that in the late 1940s

physical abuse, non-sexual, I was certainly aware of, very much so. But it was very difficult to deal with because you'd have to prove it and I would be one person against several perhaps and particularly in the situation of me being a Protestant and them Catholics.<sup>46</sup>

A Saskatchewan Superintendent revealed, however, that religious differences were not insurmountable; informal means were available to confront abuse and protect the children. As with the Alberta Superintendent, he too felt constrained in what he himself could do because he was a Protestant and the order that ran the school was Catholic. He dealt with the knowledge of abuse occurring

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43. Ibid.

44. Authors' Interview, 6 Jan. 1993. We have not yet been able to locate these reports in the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.

45. Authors' Interview (a), 6 Mar. 1993.

46. Authors' Interview, 8 Jan. 1993.

in the residential school by the effective use of his Catholic assistant. He told his assistant,

“You’re a Catholic, and you go out and get that guy.” And he did. The guy was moved. They just moved them. That was a problem, who was to lay the charge. Who was to prove it?<sup>47</sup>

The other constraint that affected how Indian Agency Superintendents policed abusive conditions in schools came from within the Indian Affairs Branch. Historically, the Department in Ottawa was not very supportive of, and certainly did not encourage, Indian Agents to report cases of sexual and physical assault by missionaries. In 1911, when an Indian Agent in British Columbia reported to his superiors in Ottawa that there was reason to believe that a local missionary was engaging in “immoral conduct” with three women from the reserve, the Agent was told by the Secretary to the Deputy Superintendent General of the Department that “as a matter of policy the Department does not allow itself to become involved with religious matters.”<sup>48</sup> In other cases, the Department did take action, but the variable seems to have been how indignant local Indian people were about incidents of abuse, and how much energy they could, and were prepared to, expend in pressing their case.<sup>49</sup>

The relative unwillingness of the Department in Ottawa to intervene in cases of abuse reflected, in part, power relations between church and state. The dependence of the federal government on organized religion to operate the schools seemed to give the churches some leverage within the Indian Affairs Branch.<sup>50</sup> This leverage was expressed in a concrete way by what appeared to be a conspiracy of silence between the Department, which in the wider division of labour was supposed to police and regulate schools, and the missionaries who

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47. Authors’ Interview, 22 Dec. 1993.

48. See Letter from Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs to Peter Byrne, Indian Agent, 27 Dec. 1911, National Archives of Canada, R.G. 10, vol. 3944, file 121, 698-53.

49. See, for example, Titley, “Industrial Education.” We would like to thank Brian Titley for this suggestion.

50. Other tensions between the church and Indian Agents revolved around how churches made money from Indian children. One superintendent reported that one of the churches in his agency was in the habit of running “these...lantern slides...for fifteen or twenty minutes and then they’d stop and sell all the kids pop and chocolate bars and of course, you can imagine where the profit went. Then they would turn around and run another ten or fifteen minutes of the movie and stop again to sell pop and chocolate bars. So I took a very dim view of this and told them that I didn’t appreciate it and they said ‘oh that’s what the Indian people want.’” Authors’ Interview (b), 6 Mar. 1993.

operated them.<sup>51</sup> One of the British Columbia Superintendents whom we interviewed was told that the Oblates had a priest stationed in the Superintendent of Education's office in Ottawa. The Superintendent was told the Oblates were there to screen amendments to the Indian Act which had implications for residential schools, and to be aware of the reports on schools which were submitted from Agencies to Ottawa. Another Alberta Superintendent was told by a priest in his agency that the Catholic church had "priests in Ottawa who were stationed there at all times, either influencing or checking the Indian Act and any new amendments that came out and they were approving them before they were included."<sup>52</sup> While both of these Superintendents stressed that they had no personal knowledge of whether this was true or not, and had no way of finding out, such claims seemed to be used by the priests to remind the Superintendents of the power and influence the church possessed, and to dissuade them from meddling in their affairs. However, the possibility, as noted above, that one Superintendent's critical report on residential schools was passed directly on to the Oblates rather than acted upon by the Department does lend credence to the existence of this relationship.

However, even if not true, rumour, innuendo, illusion, and intimidation by a church vanguard was certainly a form of impression management which prevented the self-policing of institutional hegemony. Whether or not this was in fact impression management, the reality for the Agency Superintendent was that "there was fear everywhere. The attitude was you couldn't shit disturb."<sup>53</sup> Another reported bluntly that "you didn't want to tangle with the church."<sup>54</sup>

## **The Transition to Day and Provincial Schools: Representation and Control**

The relationship of mutual, albeit strained, dependence between church and state remained largely intact until the Joint Senate and House of Commons Committee to Examine the Indian Act issued its report in 1948 and when the Department began to turn away from residential schools in its revisions to the Indian Act in 1951.<sup>55</sup>

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51. One of our interviewees had been an Education Inspector for the Indian Affairs Branch for a period of time in the 1950s. He reported, however, no knowledge of allegations of abuse in the residential schools in the province he worked in.
  52. Authors' Interview (b), 6 Mar. 1993.
  53. Authors' Interview, 22 Dec. 1993.
  54. Authors' Interview, 5 Mar. 1993.
  55. Diane Persson, "The Changing Experience of Indian Residential Schools: Blue Quills, 1931-1970," in *Indian Education in Canada: Volume 1: The Legacy*, 150.



Generally, the Agency Superintendents reported that they did not have much trouble helping convince local school boards to accept Indian children, although one noted that in his experience, if the proportion of Indian children in the integrated provincial schools exceeded thirty percent, then parents and school boards became "concerned." The Superintendents, with the help of the Regional Director of Education, were expected to help negotiate joint school agreements. All of the Superintendents attributed the relative lack of resistance on the part of provincial schools to increased Indian enrolment to the *per capita* grants the provincial schools received for every Indian child enrolled in their programme. These grants were lucrative for the provinces and allowed many schools to finance the construction of new gymnasiums, resource centres, and other facilities for the benefit of all students, not just the Indian students. Much of the money transferred to the provincial school boards from the federal government was not really spent on the specific educational needs of Indian children.<sup>56</sup>

The direct financial interests that local school boards had in the new education policy also allowed some schools to remain open at a time when they were being threatened with closure because of declining enrolment. One Superintendent reported that he had received a telephone call in the early 1960s from a member of a community that was near one of the reserves in his northern British Columbia Agency. The caller told the Superintendent that their local schools was going to be closed in the coming fall because of low enrolments, and they asked him if there was anything he could do to help the community. After consulting the band council, he agreed to "provide the school with twenty Indian students."

I got on the phone to the provincial superintendent of schools and I told him that I was going to put twenty Indian kids into the school...next year and he laughed and he said "you can't do that...I'm closing the school." I said, "you'd better open it. The kids are going to be there and...I wouldn't want the publicity you're going to get."

The plan worked and the provincial school remained open because of the federal funding of the Indian children.<sup>57</sup>

For many of the Superintendents, the two most difficult issues associated with the transition away from residential schooling was the unexpected continued high demand for it by the Indian parents themselves, and the opposition of the churches. Regarding Indian parents, several Superintendents noted that by the mid-1950s, one of the main problems they faced was trying to dissuade Indian parents from requesting that their children be sent to residential school. By this time, there were limits being placed on the number of children that a Superinten-

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56. Syd Pauls, "The Case for Band Controlled Schools," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 12 (1984): 35.

57. Authors' Interview (b), 6 Mar. 1993.

dent could admit to the residential school. According to Indian Affairs Branch regulations issued in 1963, admission was only for children who, because of circumstances, could not attend a day school:

First priority shall be given to those children whose home circumstances are such that they must be removed. Second priority shall be given to pupils for whom there are not suitable day school facilities accessible from their homes. Third priority shall be given to pupils for whom admission is required in order that they may receive a high school education.<sup>58</sup>

Some reported on the frustrations faced in trying to deter Indian parents from continuing to send their children to residential school. A Saskatchewan Superintendent reported that in the early 1960s

it was incredible, the number of parents that wanted to put their children into residential schools. We were inundated with applications....That was one of the times of the year I dreaded the most, the end of August and early September when we had to go through these applications and turn down any number of people who had applied to put their children into residential school.<sup>59</sup>

Another reported "it was pushed on you, you had to push to keep parents from requesting to send their children to residential school."<sup>60</sup>

Aside from persuasion, one of the weapons that Agency Superintendents had in their repertoire of tactics to try to deter parents from this course was the financial controls they exercised over Indian families via the Family Allowance Act of 1944. During the late 1940s and early 1950s family allowances were paid out in four different ways. First, most families received their cheques directly from the federal Department of National Health and Welfare. Second, some families received their cheques directly, but mailed to them in care of the Indian Agency Superintendent. Third, small numbers of Indian parents received their family allowance "in kind." That is, some families did not receive money, but rather were issued with vouchers that they could exchange for limited food items like pabulum, milk, tomatoes, and clothing. And fourth, there were a limited number of cases where allowances were paid into an Agency Trust Account, and where the Agency Superintendent purchased goods for the family against the account.<sup>61</sup>

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58. Indian Affairs Branch, *Field Manual* (1967), 11.49.

59. Authors' Interview, 5 Mar. 1993.

60. Authors' Interview (a), 6 Mar. 1993.

61. See Indian Affairs Branch, *Annual Report for Year ending March 31, 1947* (Ottawa:

Regardless of the system of payment, the Indian Affairs Branch's interpretation of the Family Allowance Act allowed it to cut Indian families off from the monthly payment if their children were enrolled in residential school, or if the children enrolled in day schools were "truant" for more than four days per month. The latter policy was consistent with the policy for non-Indian families in that under the federal Family Allowance Act payments could be withheld if the child was "truant" from school for more than four days per month.<sup>62</sup> While some Indian agents at the 1947 conference of Indian Agents in the Maritimes and Quebec wanted to see the period of truancy shortened to two or three days per month for Indian children in order to "encourage" school attendance, Branch employees seemed to follow, by and large, the wider guidelines set out by the federal and provincial governments for non-Indian children.<sup>63</sup>

The rationale behind stopping family allowance payments to families whose children were enrolled in residential school seems to have been that since the state and the missionaries were responsible for the daily care of children in the schools, the family did not "need" the payment. While it is unclear whether this provision initially was intended to be a weapon specifically to deter Indian parents from sending their children to residential school, some Superintendents used it as such. One northern Alberta Superintendent stated that he had used the Family Allowance "as a stick" to coerce Indian parents into complying with Branch educational initiatives which involved deterring enrolment in residential schools and ensuring regular attendance at day schools.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that many Indian parents continued to rely on, and in some cases, demand, residential schools even when they were falling into disfavour with the Department and other Indian people needs to be interpreted with care. It certainly does not mean that Indian parents were neglectful, recalcitrant, and uncommitted to "family values." Nor does it mean that they accepted the racist assumptions upon which the system was based.

Some of the Agency Superintendents whom we interviewed attributed the continued demand for residential schools as simply the result of years of successful "brainwashing" of Indian parents by the Branch and missionaries. While the "residential school mentality" concept has some merit and needs further investigation, it is just as likely that material conditions also played a role. It seems that at least in some cases, Indian parents recognized that in times of illness, poverty,

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King's Printer, 1948), 224-25.

62. K. Coates, "A Very Imperfect Means of Education: Indian Day Schools in the Yukon Territory, 1890-1955," in *Indian Education in Canada, Volume 1: The Legacy*, 145; see also Persson, "Changing Experience of Indian Residential Schools," *ibid.*, 157.
63. See Indian Affairs Branch, "Report of Discussions at Conference of Indian Agents from Quebec and the Maritimes" (Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1947).
64. Authors' Interview, 29 Jan. 1993.

or the absence of a parent, a residential school might be the best choice, especially if the alternative was having the child taken into care by social welfare agency.<sup>65</sup> According to one Superintendent, the reasons parents gave for continuing to send their children to residential schools when they had the option of keeping them at home were "a lack of adequate housing, distance to school, [and] they can't afford to keep kids at home."<sup>66</sup> Others reported similar reasons: "The kids would get three square meals a day, clothes."<sup>67</sup> Thus, part of the process that seems to have been occurring in this context was that at least some Indian parents, particularly ones with fewer resources, had used the residential school as a familial survival strategy. Not unlike the case of poor urban working-class parents in Victorian Britain and Canada who used reformatories and industrial schools to sustain the family in times of crisis,<sup>68</sup> Indian parents used the institution even when they may have disagreed with the underlying institutional values.<sup>69</sup>

While the degree of missionary opposition to day and provincial schools was mixed, some churches were clearly unhappy about the policy to shift towards secular education of Indian children in state schools. According to the 1966 Hawthorn Report,

We note that the greater the educational resources possessed by a church or the greater its investment in Indian education, the greater its anxiety to maintain the status quo. On the contrary, the faiths having the least material interests in Indian education are much more open to innovation.<sup>70</sup>

This was an indirect reference to differences between Catholic and Protestants regarding the future of residential schools. Grant argues more pointedly that while Protestants presented little opposition to the proposed shift away from residential schools, Catholics vehemently were opposed. When the Branch began to consider the closure of residential schools after the war, the Oblates argued in 1946 that "the present system of education...is satisfactory to us, and no change whatever is either desired or will be accepted by us."<sup>71</sup>

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65. See for example, Coates, "Very Imperfect Means of Education," 140; Abel, "Of Two Minds," 85, 90.

66. Authors' Interview, 5 Mar. 1993.

67. Authors' Interview, 8 Jan. 1993.

68. Alan Brooks, "The Fragmented Family: Family Strategies in the Face of Death, Illness and Disease, Montreal, 1860-1885," in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. J. Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

69. See Redford, "Attendance at Indian Residential Schools," 48-49.

70. Harry Hawthorn, *A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967), 61.

71. Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 198.

Resistance by the Catholic church was experienced by one Superintendent who worked at a Saskatchewan Agency in the mid-1960s, and who was involved actively in the transfer of Indian children, at the request of their parents, from the local residential school to provincial schools. The situation was complicated by the fact that the parents, who had earlier sent their children to a Catholic residential school, wanted their children to attend an integrated public school. When asked whether there was a strong church presence in the community he responded:

Yes, very much and to the point where the parents were threatened by the church. I was personally threatened...that all kinds of bad things would happen and so on, to the point where they would go to Ottawa and ensure my career ended...and in fact they did [go to Ottawa to complain about me]. But, my career didn't end because I was very fortunate there were people within the system then that understood what we were trying to do and in fact we had to respect the...aspirations of parents.<sup>72</sup>

In a comment reflecting an increasing concern over the representation of Indian interests, this Superintendent went on to suggest that

if we didn't take them on, then of course the community didn't have a chance. They wouldn't think of taking them on but, if they could see that we would be on their side...they got an awful lot of courage from the fact that we were on the Indian side as opposed to being on the church side and trying to influence the Indians. This time we were on the Indian side which I think they saw as a major shift.<sup>73</sup>

Following the transfer of children out, and subsequent closure of many of the residential schools, most Superintendents noted that the power and influence of the church, within both Indian communities and the Department, began to wane. This meant that they increasingly could rely on the support of officials in Ottawa when they challenged missionary hegemony. This shift within the Department was evident in an episode recounted by one British Columbia Superintendent which had occurred in the late 1960s. He reported that at one settlement in his District

the church had made their property available for the Indian people to put shacks up on and they encouraged a lot of these people in the outlying areas to come down and put their people on this piece of land which was church property and then they could send their kids to the parochial

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72. Authors' Interview, 5 Mar. 1993.

73. *Ibid.*

school which was next door and of course they would send me the bill...

The difficulty that the Superintendent had with this practice, though, was that according to Departmental policy, per capita grants for education in parochial day schools were paid only by the Department when the Indian children actually resided on reserve land. Since the church property was not reserve land, the church was ineligible for the grants. The Superintendent decided to take some action to correct this situation and reported that he had

crossed all the names off [the pay list] because they didn't live on the reserve. This went on for a few years and during this process the local priest was very upset and told me several times about it and I said that was the policy and I have no recourse.

The church took up the issue with headquarters in Ottawa and the issue went all the way to the then Minister of the Department. Someone in the Indian Affairs Branch in Ottawa had sent the Superintendent, anonymously, copies of the correspondence between the church and the Minister. In the correspondence

they [the missionaries] were being very critical of me for not paying these bills....Well I sure give...[the Minister] his dues, he told them in no uncertain terms, all I was doing was following agency policy and that's the way it was going to be and they would not be paid.

Following the decision, the church cleared the Indian people off their land and burned the shacks down.<sup>74</sup>

With the shift away from residential schools, one of the *raison d'être*'s for the presence of the church within Indian communities had disappeared. While it is doubtful that churches turned large profits from the operation of residential schools, the *per capita* grants nevertheless provided them with a financial base upon which to sustain their presence within Indian communities. One Superintendent reported that shortly before he had retired from the Department in the mid-1970s, he returned to a community in one of his former Agencies in northern Alberta.

I went up...and the father's residence was run down, grass growing up through the steps, and I was rather amazed. Father x was still up there and I knew him when I was up there...and he said to me, "we get no more grants for the residential schools." He was quite frank, he said "we maintained the missions on the grant for the residential schools. We

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74. Authors' Interview (b), 23 Jan. 1993.

paid all the fathers to do the missionary work from the grants for the residential schools.”

The priest told the former Agency Superintendent that after the residential school grants were phased out, “they only had three [missionaries] to cover an area which they had about ten or twelve before.”<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

During the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of research on various dimensions of Indian residential schools. The research presented in this paper is clearly “one-sided” to the extent that the views, perspectives, and experiences of both missionaries who operated the schools and the Indian children who attended them are missing. Any full history of residential schools must take account of all the key actors in the institution. The aim of this article has been more modest to the extent that it has attempted to broaden the understanding of the social position, experiences, and constraints faced by one of the key actors in the administration of educational and other policies within Indian communities between 1870 and 1970, namely Indian Agents or Agency Superintendents.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, the perceptions of Indian Agents contained in the two quotes which began this article—enlightened philosophers who were Indian peoples’ best friends, versus petty despots and god-like characters who were obsessed with breaking the spirit of Indian people and controlling their most minute actions—represent caricatures that do not capture the full reality of their social position, duties, and actions.

As employees of the state, Agency Superintendents held a position that needs to be considered as being at the centre of a number of competing pressures and demands stemming in part from the contradictory mandate of the Indian Affairs Branch, and in part from the various “white” and Indian interests they were expected to mediate. According to Rianne Mahon, the mandate of the Indian Affairs Branch, like other branches of the Canadian state, has been not only to exercise control over its client group but also to represent the interests of its client

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75. Ibid.

76. See for example A.J. Looy, “The Indian Agent and His Role in the Administration of the North-West Superintendency, 1876-1893” (Ph.D. diss., Queen’s University, 1977); B. Titley, “W.M. Graham: Indian Agent Extraordinaire,” *Prairie Forum* 8 (1983); B. Titley, “Transition to Settlement: The Peace Hills Indian Agency, 1884-1890” *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. VIII*, ed. D. Akenson (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1992).

group at the Cabinet table and within society more generally.<sup>77</sup> Historically, the relative balance within Indian Affairs between controlling and representing Indian people and communities has been tipped in the direction of social control; it is nevertheless the case, particularly in light of the politicization of Indian people in recent decades, that the representation functions are assuming greater priority. Policy and practice within the Department represent, then, outcomes of this dialectical conflict between representation and social control.<sup>78</sup> While Mahon's original argument is formulated with reference to upper-level decision-making within the state, it is nevertheless relevant to understanding the context within which those who worked "in the field" for Indian Affairs carried out their duties. Indian Agency Superintendents were the front-line employees of the Department charged with fulfilling the contradictory mandate of representation and social control.

The position of Agency Superintendent was also shaped by their role as mediators between various types of Indian and non-Indian interests. The nature of "white" interests revolved mainly around gaining access to Indian land and other natural resources, labour power, and souls. These interests were articulated and pursued in a variety of ways and depended on the nature of the communities Superintendents lived and worked in. Indian Agents might be involved, for example, with oil companies, farmers, ranchers, timber companies, and others who were seeking access to Indian resources via leases or surrenders; local merchants who provided goods and services to Indian people and the Agency office; local employers who were in search of temporary or casual labour; and missionaries who ran residential schools and members of local school boards. In carrying out their duties, then, Indian Agents were at the centre of a complex set of social relations where they had to take into account the policy objectives of their superiors at the regional and national level, the actions of Indian people who were engaged in complex acts of resistance and accommodation to Department policy and practice, and the actions and interests of groups in the communities surrounding Indian reserves.

The understanding of the roles and duties of Indian Agents needs to move beyond the one-dimensional portrayals in much of the popular literature about Indian Affairs. If the position of Indian Agent is to be understood dialectically, as a social position which was charged with fulfilling a contradictory mandate of representing and controlling Indian people, then what becomes interesting about the role of Indian Agent is the way in which they managed and tried to resolve the pressures and contradictions they faced. Clearly, Indian Agents faced a variety of pressures stemming from a number of different interests that Indian

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77. R. Mahon, "Canadian Public Policy: The Unequal Structure of Representation," in *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, ed. L. Panitch (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

78. Satzewich and Wotherspoon, *First Nations*, 34-40.



people had, and that different groups within “white” society had in relation to Indian people. These differing interests constrained and influenced how they carried out their duties.

Using the case of the post-war shift away from the use of residential schooling, we suggest that these constraints ranged from relative indifference by superiors in the Branch to abuse which was occurring, to a climate of fear and intimidation perpetuated by the church in order to keep Superintendents from taking too active an interest in the internal operations of the schools. The actions of Agency Superintendents were also shaped and constrained by the resistance of some Indian people to the elimination of residential schools, and by the financial interests that local school boards had in relation to federal funding of Indian children.

