

This narrative history of a Residential School was researched and produced by the Government of Canada as part of its response to litigation and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation has not verified the content of this document. It is provided here for reference purposes only. Documented incidents of sexual and physical abuse are based on the documentary record and do not take into account survivor testimony.



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## **File Hills IRS** **School Narrative**

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This School Narrative summarizes documents that provide an over-view of the history and administration of the school.

### **NAME OF SCHOOL and VARIANTS**

- File Hills Indian Residential School [FHR-000121; FHR-000232; FHR-001177; FHR-000170]
- File Hills Boarding School [FHR-001450; FHR-000120; FHR-001208; FHR-000733]

### **CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY**

- 1884 Day School first opened by the Presbyterian Church in a small building erected on the Little Black Bear Reserve. [FHR-000018; FHR-000402; FHR-000189]
- 1886 After initially closing due to “unsettled conditions brought about by the Riel Rebellion” and low attendance, the Day School was reopened in September. [FHR-000189]
- 1889 File Hills Boarding School opened under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church in March. [FHR-000018; FHR-000003; FHR-000402; FHR-000170]
- 1889 In September, the Day School was closed and its students began attending File Hills Boarding School. [FHR-000402; FHR-000189]
- 1949 File Hills IRS was closed on June 30. [FHR-000352; FHR-000695; FHR-000690; FHR-000439; FHR-000349]

### **MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL**

Dates managed by Church 1884 - 1949

1884-1912: Presbyterian Church, Foreign Mission Committee [FHR-000439; FHR-000734; FHR-000035]

1912-1925: Presbyterian Church, Board of Home Missions and Social Services [FHR-000734; FHR-000154; FHR-001675]

1925-1949: United Church of Canada, Board of Home Missions and Social Work/  
Women's Missionary Society [FHR-000428; FHR-000261; FHR-000352; FHR-000438;  
FHR-001177; FHR-001675]

## **SCHOOL BUILDINGS**

- School was managed by Church, but buildings remained government owned. [FHR-000035; FHR-001675; FHR-001674]
- 1889: Presbyterian Mission Board , assisted by the Department of Indian Affairs, erected stone boarding school just outside the Little Black Bear Reserve and adjacent to File Hills Agency at the cost of \$1500. This building was 30' x 30' and 3 stories high. It was capable of housing 25 students and also provided a residence for the Principal and his family. [FHR-000018; FHR-000003; FHR-000402; FHR-000170]
- 1901: Frame kitchen (19' x 18') added. [FHR-00007]
- Construction began in 1910 to create more up-to-date residential school building. Completed in 1911, it was 75' x 42'. The 3 story building consisted of "spacious Dormitories" able to accommodate 65 children, playrooms, dining halls and staff quarters. By 1919, steam heat, running water, sewage system and electricity all had been added. [FHR-000402]
- 1916 Principal's Report lists School buildings as consisting of: main building, 3 storey brick (76' x 45') with hospital annex (45' x 24'); classroom, frame building with cement foundation (26' x 41'); stone principal's residence; 5 room house for farm instructor; stable (28' x 80'); granary (12' x 14'); work and tool shop; ice house; and root house. [FHR-001510]
- 1924: Original stone boarding school was demolished to make room for a 40' x 42' addition added. This addition provided a large dormitory for the girls, 4 staff bedrooms, a recreation room, bakery, laundry, and hall running through the center. [FHR-000402; FHR-000149]

- 1939: Proposal to construct manual and vocation building (18' x 32'). [FHR-000425]
- In April 1942, two classroom buildings at the school were completely destroyed by fire [FHR-000505; FHR-000252; FHR-001233]. Despite over-crowding in the dormitories and the lack of proper classroom facilities (causing poor health and working conditions) [FHR-000297], construction of new classrooms was not authorized until June 1944 [FHR-000291; FHR-000292]. New classroom building was 52' x 40' with a full basement and furnace [FHR-001301]. \$7000 was set aside for the project [FHR-000294].
- 1948 Inspection Report indicated that the school buildings were aging and thus were in need of improvements such as new water system, lighting system, re-arrangement of rooms to provide more space and floor coverings [FHR-001001]. The inspection later concluded that the school, which was in general poor condition, should be demolished and rebuilt [FHR-001180]
- After File Hills IRS was closed, the buildings were to be dismantled or sold with the understanding that they would have to be removed from their present location [FHR-001206]. By 1953, only two classroom buildings (with outbuildings) and teachers' residence (with outbuildings) remained to serve the File Hills Day School [FHR-000701; FHR-001193].
- School building and residence were turned over to the Okanese Reserve in 1966. [FHR-000709]

## **LAND**

(The school lands were always located within the boundaries of Treaty No. 4)

- File Hills IRS was located outside the boundaries of the Okanese reserve [FHR-000002; FHR-000018] adjacent to the File Hills Agency buildings [FHR-000003] approximately 75 miles NE of Regina and 12 miles N of Balcarres in the Province of Saskatchewan [FHR-000401].
- Order in Council dated June 29, 1903 placed land located on fractional section 32, and the north-east quarter of township 22, range 11, west of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meridian under the control of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for the purpose of the Presbyterian Church of Canada establishing the File Hills Boarding School. The land was granted to the Church in 1906 [FHR-000012; FHR-000013; FHR-000014; FHR-000134; FHR-000135].

- Letter dated August 6, 1913 indicates that the land occupied by the school is deeded to the Department [FHR-000090a]. However, a letter dated May 1, 1923 confirms that the land on which the school was build was indeed owned by the Presbyterian Church. [FHR-000806; FHR-000136; FHR-000141]
- Land was sold to the Department by the Presbyterian Church in 1925 for \$3000. [FHR-000121; FHR-000154]
- Original school land consisted of 413.35 acres. In 1956 all the school land was disposed of by the Crown Asset Disposal Corporation except for 101.93 acres that were added to the Okanese Reserve by Order-in-Council. [FHR-000614; FHR-000709]

### **PHOTOS, PLANS and OTHER MEDIA**

FHR-000711	23 Jan 1889	Sketch of File Hills Agency showing location of Peepeekisis, Okanese, Star Blanket, Little Black Bear reserves
FHR-000906	Feb 1923	Floor plan of Principal's residence
FHR-000134a	13 Mar 1923	Blueprint of locations of File Hills Boarding and Okanese and Star Blanket reserves
FHR-000904	Feb 1924	Diagram of Principal's residence
FHR-000905	Feb 1924	Floor plan of ground floor and basement of Principal's residence
FHR-000333	29 Aug 1948	Inspection Report - Photos and Diagrams of File Hills IRS including school buildings, laundry, diary, dormitories, staff rooms and farm buildings
FHR-000438	1949	Map of Indian Work in Saskatchewan
FHR-000337	17 Jan 1949	Photos showing buildings associated with church work in File Hills colony providing possible locations for new days school

## **GENERAL ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME**

1889	8
1892	12
1902	15
1908	25
1914	49
1928	90
1939	95-99
1943	98
1948	100

## **STUDENTS FROM OTHER RESERVES**

- Letter dated November 13, 1913 notes that it was originally thought that File Hills Boarding School would serve Pasqua, Muscowpetung and Piapot reserves, but the parents argue that the school is too far away. In the two years prior to 1913, only 3 children from these reserves were attending File Hills Boarding School [FHR-000095a; FHR-000096; FHR-000097; FHR-000099]. A 1939 report indicates that pupils attending File Hills IRS were recruited from several agencies including File Hills, Qu'Appelle Pelly and Duck Lake [FHR-000402].

## **RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

- Presbyterian Church, Foreign Mission Committee [FHR-000734; FHR-000035]
- Presbyterian Church, Board of Home Missions and Social Services [FHR-000734; FHR-000732; FHR-000154]
- Presbyterian Church, Women's Missionary Society [FHR-000154]
- United Church of Canada, Board of Home Missions and Social Services [FHR-000352]
- United Church of Canada, Women's Missionary Society [FHR-000428; FHR-000261; FHR-000352; FHR-000438]

## **WRITTEN AGREEMENTS**

- 1911 agreement between the Foreign Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada and the Federal Government for the operation and management of the school [FHR-000035]. Although the United Church took the administration of the school in 1925, no agreement between the United Church and the Department of Indian Affairs was found.

## **DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO SCHOOL INCIDENTS**

### **Incidents (Sexual)**

- No information found

### **Incidents (Physical)**

- Deaf student claimed that he had significant difficulty in classroom and as a result the teacher lost patience with him and “[b]oxed his ears”. Also indicated that he was constantly teased by older children. Student attempted to commit suicide in 1939 [FHR-000510; FHR-000511a]. Doctor disputed claim that student attempted to commit suicide [FHR-000511].
- Principal concluded that second suicide attempt by another student was in an effort to discredit staff member. His investigation concluded that “[n]o punishment was inflicted on the first offender, but the last one was well spanked in the presence of an R.C.M.P. official” [FHR-000515].

### **Incidents (Student on Student)**

- No information found

## **CONVICTIONS**

- To date, we are unaware of any convictions for abuse at File Hills IRS or of any convicted abusers present at the school.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

- In January 1903, a boy with tuberculosis was isolated from other students. Also

cases of pneumonia and scrofulous sores at the school. [FHR-000011]

- 1912: Outbreak of measles. [FHR-000082; FHR-000083]
- 1916: Outbreak of small-pox. [FHR-001463]
- 1935: Poultry house destroyed by fire. [FHR-001336]
- On April 8, 1942, two classroom buildings were completely destroyed by fire. [FHR-000252; FHR-001233]

### **PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS**

- J.C. Richardson/Principal/1884
- R. Toms/Principal/1886-1888
- Rev. Alexander Campbell/Missionary and Principal/1888 - 1889
- Rev. Donald A. MacVicar/Missionary and Principal/1889 - 1891
- Alexander Skene/Principal/1891 - ca. 1898 - 1899
- Mr. E.C. Stewart/Principal/1899
- Rev. W.H. Farrer/Principal/ca. 1899 -1900
- Miss Kate J. Gillespie (Mrs. W.R.Motherwell/Principal/ca. 1900/1901 - 1908
- Miss Jean Cunningham/Principal/1908 - 1911
- Rev. H.C. Sweet/Principal/1912-1914
- Mr. W.W. Gibson/Principal/1915-1921
- Mr. Frank Rhodes/Principal/1921 - 1942
- Rev. A.C. Huston (Principal, Round Lake)/Acting Principal/1942
- Mr. L.L. Dobbin/Principal/1942 - 1947



- Mr. Lachlan McLean/Principal/1947 - 1949

Research completed: December 16, 2004  
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The original school narrative document produced by Canada also contains a number of records that have been separated pending review.

