

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.



You are welcome to contact the NCTR if you wish to add, comment on, or challenge any versions of the history presented herein.

Fort Providence (Sacred Heart) Residential School
School Narrative
May 11, 2004

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

NAME OF SCHOOL AND VARIANTS

Undated	Providence I.R.S. [Alberta Regional 01829]
1896	Sacred Heart Convent [Holy Angels 00527]
1904	Sacred Heart boarding school, Fort Providence [FPU-000079]
1916	Providence Boarding School [FPU-000089]
1927	Providence Mission Indian Residential School [FPU-000434]
1929	Providence Indian Residential School [FPU-000463]
1933	Providence Mission Residential School [FPU-000118]
1938	Providence Mission Roman Catholic Residential School [Holy Angels 01093]
1938-1953	Providence Residential School [Fort Providence Quarterly Returns]
1951	Sacred Heart Residential School [Fort Providence Quarterly Return March 31, 1951]

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

- 1862 An article, dated July 22, 1991, in Western Oblate Studies states that the Roman Catholic Oblates desired to start a school in the following:
The Oblates appealed “to the Mother General of the Grey Nuns that sisters be sent. The first such request was from Grandin at Providence in 1862, which yielded results five years later when a party of Grey Nuns arrived in the settlement.” [Holy Angels 01187]
- 1868 Document dated March 1877 states that the Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns, opened the school at the Roman Catholic Mission in Fort Providence in 1868. [Holy Angels 00581]
A letter to the government from the Archbishop of the Mackenzie, dated June 28, 1927, states that the “Providence School is the first Indian Residential School built in the North.” [FPU-000436]
- 1896 A letter to the government mentions a school run by the Mission at Fort Providence. [Holy Angels 00537]
- 1900 An interview with the Administrator of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Athabasca and the government to discuss issues of education in the North states plans to build a facility at Fort Providence to accommodate 30 children. [Holy Angels 00570]
- 1904 A letter from Bishop Breynat states that the boarding school in Fort Providence has been open for 38 years (opening date of 1866). [FPU-000069]

- 1910 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1910 states enrolment at Fort Providence as 65 with attendance in grades 1-3. (p.1, 44-45) [Alberta National 010021]
- 1911 A newspaper article reports that Fort Providence is one of many Residential Schools to receive additional government funding for operation. The article also states that the contract with the school outlines the responsibility to provide instruction in religion and life skills. [Alberta National 011379]
- 1913 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1911 states the following about the school and the grounds:
Our staff consists of 2 reverend fathers, 6 lay brothers and 12 sisters. We have 33 head of cattle, which supply milk and butter; also fresh meat occasionally. We have 22 poultry. There are 34 acres under cultivation. [Alberta National 010024]
- 1921 Fort Providence appears on a list of "Indian Schools" operating in the Northwest Territories. [FPU-000095]
- 1930 A letter from the Roman Catholic Mission to the government states that the Fort Providence students moved into the new school buildings in the fall of 1930. Further additions include a new well and poultry house that is 75x16 feet. [FPU-000515]
- 1943 Fort Providence Mission Residential School appears listed in an extract from the minutes of a Treasury meeting as one of the "church-owned Indian residential schools." [FPU-000240]
- 1947 A government memorandum regarding Providence Mission Residential School states: "there are thirteen non-Indian boarders." [FPU-000318]
- 1951 H.R. Low's Report to the Northwest Territories Council on Northern Education includes a section on the residential school in Fort Providence:
The school here is a residential school which also provides for a few day pupils. The teachers in the three classrooms are making very earnest efforts to follow modern educational practices but the physical facilities are not always to their advantage...
I was favourably impressed by the attempts of the teachers to give practical significance to the education of the pupils by making use of a shack which had been built by the reverend Fathers to give the boys and girls practical experience in ways of living. The boys were helping in the furnishing of the shack and the girls were being guided to carry out the social and domestic duties.
Later in the report a chart of enrollment for the 1950-51 school year states that Fort Providence provided education for grades kindergarten to Grade 8. [North-NWT 03000]
- 1958 A financial statement for grants given by the government for the education of Non-Inuit and Non-Native students includes "Fort Providence Residential." [North-NWT 00528]

1960 A document from the government, dated March 1961, states that the “last mission residential school - at Fort Providence - closed in June 1960.” [North-NWT 00614]

MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL

Dates managed by Church

Circa 1868 – 1960 The Fort Providence Residential School at the Fort Providence Mission was managed by the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation / Roman Catholic Missions of Mackenzie and staffed by the Grey Nuns Sisters of Charity from 1868 until its closure in 1960. Oblate Brothers and Reverend Fathers were also involved at the school. Late in the 19th Century the school began to receive funding from the government even though it was not located within an area included in any treaties. [Saddle Lake 02911; Holy Angels 00581; North-NWT 00614]

Dates managed by Government

1934 “Providence Mission,” Fort Providence appears on a list of residential schools in an Indian Affairs memorandum on per capita grants. The memo describes the Governments relationship with the schools as follows:

The above is a partial list of residential schools in connection with whom the Department [of Indian Affairs] pays a per capita grant. In these cases the Department did not build the schools and does not exercise the rights of ownership.

In a number of these cases the Department is being asked to assume financial responsibility and to pay grants towards the capital costs of the buildings, besides making additional grants for additions, repairs and maintenance. The fact that the Department has undertaken the payment of per capita grants implies a certain responsibility for the up-keep of the buildings, if not for the capital costs. [Lesser Slave Lake 00047]

1951 H.R. Low’s Report to the Northwest Territories Council on Northern Education includes a section on the residential school in Fort Providence stating that the school is under the dual administration of the Federal Government and the Territorial Government. However, the school was still managed by the Fort Providence Roman Catholic mission. [North-NWT 03000]

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

1900 An interview with the Administrator of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Athabasca and the government to discuss issues of education in the North states plans to build a facility at Fort Providence to accommodate 30 children. [Holy Angels 00570]

1909 Bishop Breynat states that “considerable improvements” at the boarding school at Fort Providence had been made and he requests permission to increase the number of Indian pupils to 60. [FPU-000082]

- 1911 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1911 states the following about the school and the grounds:
Here the Roman Catholic Mission has the most extensive school buildings in the north. They are beautifully situated on the north bank of the Mackenzie River. A large convent is under construction... A magnificent garden surrounds the buildings, and a fine farm is close by... The water-supply is derived from the Mackenzie River. Sanitation is excellent, and the general condition of the mission compares very favourably with any in the west and north. [Alberta National 010022]
- 1912 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1912 states the following about the school's buildings:
The foundations are of blocks of wood, the walls are logs covered on the outside with tar paper and planks. Their thickness is about ten inches. There is a new wing under construction which will greatly add to the school. It will be a three-story addition, 30 by 30 feet, and will contain several classrooms and dormitories. The accommodation at present is just about sufficient for the grant from the department. There are five large dormitories, whose cubic space is 27,346 cubic feet, sufficient for 64 pupils. The class-rooms are three in number, whose floor space is sufficient for over a hundred pupils, but whose cubic space, 15,375 feet, accommodates only 61.
A small dormitory is kept ready for cases of sickness.
The school is situated on two acres owned by the Oblates. [Alberta National 010023]
- 1913 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1912 states the following about the school's buildings:
Main building, 91x30 feet, 3 stories. The walls are logs. A second building 65x30 feet; a laundry 22x20 feet; hospital 40x20 feet; stable, 70x27 feet; vegetable cellar and ice-house. [Alberta National 010024]
- 1929 A letter to the government from the Roman Catholic Mission states that a new barn, 75x34 feet, is nearly completed. Government funding for the reconstruction of the main building of the residence, that had previously been promised, is requested for the purchase of building supplies. [FPU-000455]
- 1929 Minutes of the Privy Council state that the main buildings at the "Providence Indian Residential School" are too old to be suitable for the education of children. The government agrees to pay for half of the cost of the construction of a new school over the period of two years: a sum equaling \$30,000. [FPU-000463]
- 1930 A report on the boarding school in Fort Providence, dated August 13, 1936, states the following about the buildings: "This building was erected in 1930. The main part of the building is three stories high, and the wings two stories. This building is steam heated, and has hot and cold water." [FPU-000122]
- 1930 A letter from the Roman Catholic Mission to the government states that the students moved into the new school buildings in the fall of 1930. Further additions include a new well and poultry house that is 75x16 feet. Additional

funding to cover the cost of installing the hot water heating system and electrical lighting is requested. [FPU-000515] Treasury Board meeting minutes dated August 16, 1934 state that a \$5,000 grant is approved to pay for the additional costs to the construction of the new residence at the Providence Mission Indian Residential School. [FPU-000531]

- 1938 A memorandum from the government states that funding will be provided to the Providence Mission Indian Residential School for new lighting equipment. [FPU-000583]
- 1940 A handwritten letter from the Principal of the boarding school in Fort Providence thanks the government for the recent assistance in the installation of electricity in the school buildings. [FPU-000130]
- 1941 A hand-written letter from the Principal of Providence Residential School to the government states that the government supplied material for various repairs to the school buildings. [FPU-000193]
- 1946 The “Dietary Service Report” for Fort Providence Residential School states the following about the facilities:
Kitchen: 24.5x24 feet
Dining Room: 38x24 feet
Serving: 10.5x10.5 feet
Building ventilation is good and the water source is from a well dug under the river basin. [Alberta National 170366A]
- 1948 The government grants funds for purchasing appliances for laundry, heating, and cooking. [Holy Angels 00802]
- 1950 Fort Providence appears in a list of “Church-Owned Residential Schools.” The government provided these with general renovations and the addition of some kitchen equipment. [Holy Angels 00089]

LAND

- 1900 The “Roman Catholic boarding school” in Fort Providence appears on a list of residential schools for which the government is considering granting land for the construction of new buildings. The proposed land grant is stated in the following:
It is submitted that as a further assistance to boarding schools, where the religious bodies interested erect the buildings, there might be no objection to giving them land grants proportionate to the size of the school, say at the rate of 10 acres per authorized pupil, provided that in the district which the school is situated unoccupied Government land is available. [Alberta Regional 00384]
- 1908 The boarding school at Fort Providence is located on the Mackenzie River (in the Mackenzie District) a short distance inland from Great Slave Lake and is located outside of a treaty limits. [FPU-000080]

1913 The school is situated on 31 acres owned by the Oblates. [Alberta National 010024]

PHOTOS, PLANS AND OTHER MEDIA

There are no photos or building plans in the Fort Providence document collection at this time.

GENERAL ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME

Enrollment

Year	Residential Students	Day School Students	Grades
00/00/0000	124	None enrolled	Not stated
1901	70	Not stated	Not stated
1902	“over sixty”	Not stated	Not stated
1903	75	Not stated	Not stated
1905	75	Not stated	Not stated
1910	65	Not stated	Not stated
1911	65	Not stated	Not stated
1912	70	Not stated	Not stated
1913	64	Not stated	Not stated
1914	48	Not stated	Not stated
1915	65	Not stated	1-4
1916	65	Not stated	1-4
1917	69	Not stated	1-4
1918	69	Not stated	1-4
1919	70	Not stated	1-4
1920	84	Not stated	1-4
1921	67	Not stated	1-5
1922	58	Not stated	1-5
1923	62	Not stated	1-5
1924	68	Not stated	1-5
1925	57	Not stated	1-5
1926	58	Not stated	1-5
1927	58	Not stated	1-5
1928	51	Not stated	1-5
1929	39	Not stated	1-6
1930	54	Not stated	1-6
1931	51	Not stated	1-8
1932	60	Not stated	1-6
1933	68	Not stated	1-6
1934	70	Not stated	1-6
1936	58	Not stated	1-6
1937	60	Not stated	1-7
1938	67	Not stated	1-6
1939	68	Not stated	1-5
1940	71	Not stated	1-6
1941	45	Not stated	1-5

1942	45	Not stated	1-5
1943	61	Not stated	1-7
1944	75	Not stated	1-6
1945	52	Not stated	1-6
1946	46	Not stated	1-6
1947	68	Not stated	1-6
1948	“75 Treaty Indians” 13 “Half Breeds (Destitute)”	14 “Half Breeds”	1-6
1949	93	Not stated	1-7
1950	101	Not stated	K-8
1951	104	Not stated	1-8
1952	106	Not stated	1-7
1953	105	7	Not stated
1954	105	11	Not stated
1955	96	23	Not stated
1956	113	18 ¹	Not Stated
1957	90	25 ²	Not Stated
1958	101	27 ³	Not Stated

STUDENTS FROM OTHER RESERVES

Correspondence from the early 1900s states that students from the “Slave Lake Tribe” located within Treaty 8, Good Hope, and Peel River attended Fort Providence Residential School.

Correspondence from 1940 states that two students were transported to Fort Providence Indian Residential School from Fort Simpson.

Fort Providence was not located within any treaty boundaries or within a reserve. The general attendance came from the areas surrounding Fort Providence.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

1866 Document dated March 1877 states that the Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns, arrive at Fort Providence Mission. [Holy Angels 00581]

1905 Government correspondence regarding the Roman Catholic boarding school at Fort Providence states: “They have a permanent staff of twelve Sisters of the Grey Nun Order, and the school is immediately under the control of Bishop Breynat, of the Mackenzie Diocese (Roman Catholic Oblates). [FPU-000080]

WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

1911 A brief letter to Rev. Breynat from the government states that copies of the “contracts made with this Department for the future management and maintenance of the Indian Boarding Schools at Fort Resolution and Fort Providence” are enclosed. A copy of the contract is not available at this time. [FPU-000088]

DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO ABUSE

To date, we are unaware of any convictions for abuse at Fort Providence Residential School or of any convicted abusers present at the school.

Sexual Abuse

No information at this time.

Physical Abuse

No information at this time.

On Student by Student Abuse

No information at this time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Health

1913 The government's Annual Report on First Nations people for the fiscal year of 1913 states:

The general state of health has improved the last few years; but still we had to deplore the death of 9 of our younger pupils, this winter, by a malignant attack of influenza, which nothing could check. Their constitutions are so weak that we keep continually dosing them with iron and cod liver oil to keep them in a normal state. [Alberta National 010024]

1916 An extract from a report on the conditions of the Providence Boarding School gives a generally good report. The building was satisfactory and the children "appeared bright and clean." There is a swimming area on the river for summertime use. The health of the students is generally good but at the time of the visit many children had mild grippe. Two children died of illness shortly after being transferred from Good Hope. They did not have the proper health certificate and therefore it is recommended that the staff follow admission regulations more strictly. [FPU-000089]

1924 The Doctor's monthly report on Fort Providence mentions an outbreak of typhoid at the boarding school: "Five of the children died, and a few of the convalescents are so badly affected that their complete recovery is problematic." The doctor states that the cause of the illness could be attributed to children coming from other areas and bringing the illness and also to defects in the buildings' drainage and surface water conditions. [FPU-000408]

1935 Memorandum of an inquiry into the cause and circumstances of the death of a pupil at Providence Indian Residential School states the cause of death as influenza. [FPU-000613[000-003]; FPU-000613[002-003]]

- 1936 A Royal Canadian Mounted Police typed statement from the Fort Providence Roman Catholic Mission School Infirmary Nurse states that a student died of meningitis on April 15 of that year. [FPU-000622[002-007]]
- 1946 A “Memorandum of an inquiry into the cause and circumstances of the death” of a pupil at Providence Indian Residential School states the cause of death as tuberculosis. [FPU-000623[000-003]; FPU-000623[002-003]]
- 1951 A “Memorandum of an inquiry into the cause and circumstances of the death” of a pupil at Providence Indian Residential School states the cause of death as heart trouble due to influenza. [FPU-000626[001-004]; FPU-000626[003-004]]

School Activities

- 1924 Letter from the Principal of the “Fort Providence Boarding School” states that the older girls receive one hour of classroom education with the remainder of the day devoted to learning household duties such as sewing. [FPU-000100]
- 1927 A letter from the government states that sports equipment is to be delivered to the “Providence Mission Indian Residential School.” [FPU-000434]
- 1936 A report on the boarding school in Fort Providence states that the Fathers “operate a small farm, where they raise a little grain.” They also raised horses, chickens, and grow a small garden. The school is run by 11 Sisters, three Fathers, and four lay brothers. [FPU-000122]
- 1946 Dietary Service Report states that some students work in the residence by preparing vegetables, cooking, washing dishes, gardening, and housecleaning. Livestock is supplied by a local farmer, and moose and caribou are provided by hunters. [Alberta National 170366A]
- 1951 H.R. Low’s Report to the Northwest Territories Council on Northern Education includes a section on the residential school in Fort Providence:
 I was favourably impressed by the attempts of the teachers to give practical significance to the education of the pupils by making use of a shack which had been built by the reverend Fathers to give the boys and girls practical experience in ways of living. The boys were helping in the furnishing of the shack and the girls were being guided to carry out the social and domestic duties. [North-NWT 03000]

Attendance Problems

- 1941 A letter from the Roman Catholic Mission to the government states that the student attendance has dropped to a level that would not sustain the continued operation of the school. Decreased attendance is attributed to children spending more time in the wilderness with their parents and to those orphaned/abandoned children that wander between camps without supervision and are not being brought into the school. It is requested that the government take steps to increase the number of pupils in attendance through the Indian Agent and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. [FPU-000133]

1942 An RCMP report states that three young brothers ran away from the Fort Providence Residential School but were found and returned to the school. [FPU-000140]

1959 Government correspondence regarding admission policies at residential schools in the Mackenzie District, with specific reference to a case at Fort Providence, states the government's admission policy in the following:

However, the policy applied by the Department of Northern Affairs restricts admission of children to residential school to those living too far from the school to attend on a day basis, and those who for reasons of parental neglect are committed to a residential school by Court Order. [Alberta Regional 03983]

Other

1938 Correspondence states that night watchmen are employed by the Fort Providence Residential School. [Holy Angels 01016]

PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators	Position	Dates
F. Breynat, O.M.I., Bishop of Adiamyth, Apostolic Vicar of Mackenzie and Yukon	Administrator	1902, 1904, 1905, 1921, 1927, 1938 Start and end dates are unknown
Rev. Fr. Lefebvre	Head of Mackenzie Mission	1927 Start and end dates are unknown
Reverend Father Michel	Superintendent of Roman Catholic Mission and Fort Providence Residential School	1941, 1947 Start and end dates are unknown
Rev. Father Jean Denis O.M.I.,	Head of Roman Catholic Mission	August 1958 Start and end dates are unknown
Principals	Position	Dates
Sister St. Elzear	Principal	Unknown date to 1912
Sister McGuirk	Principal	1913 to August 1, 1918
Sister St. Rose of Lima	Principal	August 1, 1918, to October 1927
Sister Serrasin (Lerrasin sic)	Principal	October, 1927 to October 1933
Sister Cecile Caron, S.G.M.	Principal	October 1933, September 1943-January 1944, September 1945-June 30, 1947
Sister Alida Gamache	Residence Matron	September 1946 Start and end dates are unknown
Sister Robinet	Principal	October 27, 1933
Sister Mary Mack, S.G.M	Principal	1936, March 1938-June 30 1939, September 1940- June 1943, January 1944-July 1945, September 1947-July 1950, 1954
Sister Sauka	Principal	September 1939-June 1940
Sister Elizabeth Kristoff	Principal	December 1950-January 1953

⁷²³⁴

¹ This document states that Breynat visits the missions that he oversees “up-north”.

Please Note:

We possess very few documents for Fort Providence after 1952. We only possess quarterly returns between 1939 and 1953.

¹ Even though the day school is stated as Roman Catholic a footnote states that “all pupils receive instruction at Federal Day School.” Documents listing Federal Day Schools up to and including this document do not list Fort Providence as having a federal day school. (Doc cover date is March 23, 1959) [North-NWT 00718]

² The day school is stated as “Day School Division of Residential School.” Documents listing Federal Day Schools up to and including this document do not list Fort Providence as having a federal day school. (Doc cover date is March 23, 1959) [North-NWT 00718]

³ The day school is stated as “Day School Division of Residential School.” Documents listing Federal Day Schools up to and including this document do not list Fort Providence as having a federal day school. (Doc cover date is March 23, 1959) [North-NWT 00718]

² Both she and Sister Mack sign as Principal for this quarter.

³ Both she and Sister Caron sign as principal on returns for this quarter.

⁴ IRSRC has no Quarterly Returns in our possession after the quarter ending December 31, 1952. Therefore we cannot confirm that this was the end of Sister Kristoff’s role as Principal.

The original school narrative document produced by Canada also contains a number of records that have been separated pending review.



National Centre for
Truth and Reconciliation

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA