

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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**Poplar Hill Development School
IAP School Narrative**

NAME IN THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT (Schedule E/F)

Poplar Hill

OTHER NAMES KNOWN AS (AKAs)

1962	Mennonite Mission School [PHD-000008]
1962 to 1969	Poplar Hill Indian Residential School; Poplar Hill Residential School [PHD-000106; PHD-000045-0000; PHD-000213]
1969 to 1989	Poplar Hill Development School [PHD-000213; PHD-000221-0001; PHD-000259]

LOCATION

The Poplar Hill Development School was located across the Berens River from the community of Poplar Hill, Ontario, off reserve [PLK-001215; PHD-000213; NCA-001724-0001; PHD-000219]. Poplar Hill is located 120 km north of Red Lake, Ontario.

PROVINCE/TERRITORY

Ontario

OPERATING DATES AS AN INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

These dates represent the time during which the Government of Canada was responsible for the operation of the Indian Residential School, excluding any periods of closure.

September 19, 1962 to June 30, 1989

OPERATING DATES CONTEXT

The Poplar Hill Residential School opened on September 20, 1962, though children arrived at the IRS on September 19 [PHD-000010; PHD-000017; PHD-000106; NCA-006746-0001]. In September 1969, the name of the school changed from Poplar Hill Residential School to Poplar Hill Development School [PHD-000213]. A news article from the Mennonite Reporter notes that in the fall of 1989 the Poplar Hill Development School closed [PHD-000143].

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

1962 to 1989 Mennonite Northern Light Gospel Mission [PHD-000007; PHD-000142, pgs. 6-7; PHD-000143]

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Date	Event	Document Reference
September 20, 1962	The Poplar Hill Residential School began operating on September 20 with one classroom and eleven pupils, though these children arrived at the IRS on September 19. The purpose of the school was to offer an occupational program for young people. Instruction at IRS was intended for approximately 10-15 standard age pupils to take full time academic instruction and 15-20 over-age pupils to take half time upgrading and half time shop and domestic science classes. For	PHD-000010 PHD-000017 PHD-000106 NCA-006746-0001, pg. 2 PHD-000005 PHD-000007 PHD-003957

	<p>example, a report lists a grade 9 student as being 21 years old in December 1965.</p> <p>The federal government agreed to pay the costs of room, board and tuition fees for students. Tuition fees were to cover instructional costs with the necessary classroom materials being provided by the federal government. The Northern Light Gospel Mission would provide the buildings that housed the students.</p>	
October 1962	By October 1962, the IRS had two classrooms in operation with a total of 30 pupils.	PHD-000107
September 1965	Beginning September 1965 the IRS had three classrooms operating with 60 pupils enrolled.	PHD-000160
July 1966	Approximately 20 children under the age of 14 were taking regular academic subjects according to the provincial course of studies at the school. Approximately 30 students were taking five and a half hours of academic up-grading in basic subjects.	PHD-000221-0000 PHD-000221-0001 PHD-000221-0002
September 1969	The name of the school changed from Poplar Hill Residential School to Poplar Hill Development School. The Principal noted that the program at the school was designed to develop age-grade "retarded" students to their maximum academic potential; to use manual training to foster practical skills applicable to making a living in the changing north; to develop social awareness; and to provide a "family-type" experience rather than an "institutional-type" experience.	PHD-000213
October 1971	A grade nine program had been started at the IRS for a pilot group of pupils, with a suggestion to continue with a class of eight to 15 students drawn each year from the smaller communities in the Sioux Lookout District. Manual training, home economics and shop, had 20 to 35 teenage students per year in grades five to eight. The Northern Light Gospel Missions proposed and submitted to the federal government a budget increase of 15%, and the District Superintendent of Education deemed this increase justified.	PHD-000221-0000 PHD-000221-0001 PHD-000221-0003
December 16, 1971	An agreement between the federal government and the Northern Light Gospel Missions, Inc. was signed for the provision of professional school services for grades one to nine for the school year September 1971 to June 1972. The agreement included room and board for all students and the payment of monthly allowances to grade nine students.	PHD-000223 PHD-000226-0002 PHD-000226-0003 PHD-000226-0004 PHD-000226-0005
1973	The education program at Poplar Hill Development School included a basic source of studies outlined by the Ontario Department of Education; teenage students spending some of their time on academic studies and the remainder on practical courses that would help them lead a productive life in the North; and age-grade "retarded" students take an intensified program that would permit upgrading in preparation for high school courses. The practical work included a home economics program (sewing, cooking, child care, health) and shop program (carpentry, furniture making, mechanics, electrical wiring).	PHD-000232-0002
January 12, 1973	An Agreement between the federal government and the Northern Light Gospel Missions, Inc. was drawn up for the provision of professional school services and maintenance services for September 1972 to June 1973. Grades one to nine would be taught at the IRS in addition to the practical training program.	PHD-000232-0000 PHD-000232-0001 PHD-000232-0002 PHD-000232-0003 PHD-000232-0004 PHD-000232-0005 PHD-000232-0006
September 20, 1978	A federal government memorandum noted that the Poplar Hill IRS was owned and operated by the Mennonite Northern Lights Gospel Mission and that the federal government had no responsibility for the buildings but was to pay the for students attending class.	PHD-000242
1979 to 1980	Agreements between the federal government and the	NCA-001726

	Northern Light Gospel Mission were drawn up for the provision of professional school services and room and board for students in grades one to nine for the school year.	NCA-001725-0000 NCA-001725-0001 NCA-001725-0000
1981	An unsigned addendum to a Tuition Agreement between the federal government and the Northern Light Gospel Missions for the accommodation of fifty students at the Poplar Hill Development School notes that the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council was to approve special course outlines.	NCA-001723-0001
September 1989	Articles from the Mennonite Reporter note that in the fall of 1989 the Poplar Hill Development School closed due to a dispute between the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and school officials over the practice of using corporal punishment as a form of discipline at the school. The school refused to abandon the practice, and in August 1989 parents were told by the Council that no funds would be available to send their children back to school in the fall. One article reported that parents also refused to send their children back to the school. The Nishnawbe Education Council initiated an investigation into child abuse at the school, but as of December 1989 no one had come forward. Investigations were also carried out by the police and Family Services. No charges resulted from the year-long police investigation.	PHD-000143 PHD-000144 PHD-000145 PHD-000173 PHD-000146 PHD-000147 PHD-000148

EDUCATION OF STUDENTS

Grades taught at the Indian residential school

School Years	Grades offered	Document Reference
September 1962	Grades 1 to 4	PHD-000106
October 1962 to February 1963	Grades 1 to 6	PHD-000107 PHD-000110
March to June 1963	Grades 1 to 7	PHD-000111 PHD-000114
September 1963 to June 1964	Grades Kindergarten to 8	PHD-000817, pgs. 9-10 PHD-000119
September 1964 to June 1965	Grades Beginner to 7 and a graduating class	PHD-000821, pgs. 9-13
September 1965 to June 1966	Grades Beginner to 8 and a graduating class	PHD-000800, pgs. 6-12
September 1966 to June 1967	Grades Beginner to 8	PHD-000822, pgs. 5-8
September 1967 to June 1968	Grades Primary to Intermediate, Grade 7 and Seniors	PHD-000823, pgs. 4-8
September 1968 to June 1969	Grades Beginner to 7 and a graduating class	PHD-000824, pgs. 5-10
September 1969 to June 1970	Grades 1 to 7 and a graduating class	PHD-000825, pgs. 5-9
September 1970 to June 1971	Grades 1 to 7 and a graduating class	PHD-000826, pgs. 5-10
October 1971	Grades 1 to 9 A Grade 9 program had been started during the 1971/72 school year.	PHD-000221-0000 PHD-000827, pgs. 5-10
September 1972 to June 1973	Grades Primary to 9	PHD-000828, pgs. 7-12
September 1973 to June 1974	Grades Primary to 9	PHD-000829, pgs. 5-10
September 1974 to June 1975	Grades Primaries, Juniors, Intermediates and Seniors	PHD-000830, pgs. 5-9
September 1975 to June 1976	Grades Primary to 9	PHD-000831, pgs. 5-6, 8-9, 11, 13
September 1976 to June 1977	Grades Primary to 9	PHD-000832, pgs. 7-12
September 1977 to June 1978	Grades Pre-1 to 9	PHD-000833, pgs. 5-10

September 1978 to June 1979	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000834, pgs. 5-10
September 1979 to June 1980	Grades 1 to 10	PHD-000835, pgs. 5-10
September 1980 to June 1981	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000257, pgs. 5-10
September 1981 to June 1982	Grades 1 to Seniors	PHD-000258, pgs. 5-10
September 1982 to June 1983	Grades 1 to Seniors	PHD-000836, pgs. 5-10
September 1983 to June 1984	Grades Primary, 2 to 7 and Seniors	PHD-000259, pgs. 5-11
September 1984 to June 1985	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000260, pgs. 5-6, 9-12
September 1985 to June 1986	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000261, pgs. 7-12
September 1986 to June 1987	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000818, pgs. 5-7, 9-13
September 1987 to June 1988	Grades 1 to 9	PHD-000262, pgs. 5-7, 9-13
September 1988 to June 1989	Grades 1 to 8	PHD-000837, pgs. 5-7, 9-14

Other Schools Attended by Residents

There is no indication from documents available that residents at Poplar Hill Development School attended classes at other schools.

GENERAL ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME

School Years	Number of Residents	If applicable, day scholars	Document Reference
September 1962 to June 1964	35 (average)	n/a	PHD-000106 PHD-000251
September 1963 to June 1964	45	n/a	PHD-000817, pgs. 9-10
September 1964 to June 1965	57	n/a	PHD-000821, pgs. 9-13
September 1965 to June 1966	66	n/a	PHD-000800, pgs. 6-7, 9, 11-12
September 1966 to June 1967	60	n/a	PHD-000822, pgs. 5-8
September 1967 to June 1968	64	n/a	PHD-000823, pgs. 4-8
September 1968 to June 1969	73	n/a	PHD-000824, pgs. 5-10
September 1969 to June 1970	57	n/a	PHD-000825, pgs. 5-9
September 1970 to June 1971	60	n/a	PHD-000826, pgs. 5-10
September 1971 to June 1972	62	n/a	PHD-000827, pgs. 5-10
September 1972 to June 1973	99	n/a	PHD-000828, pgs. 7-12
September 1973 to June 1974	64	n/a	PHD-000829, pgs. 5-10
September 1974 to June 1975	66	n/a	PHD-000830, pgs. 5-9
September 1975 to June 1976	57	n/a	PHD-000831, pgs. 5-6, 8-9, 11, 13
September 1976 to June 1977	58	n/a	PHD-000832, pgs. 7-12

September 1977 to June 1978	60	n/a	PHD-000833, pgs. 5-10
September 1978 to June 1979	57	n/a	PHD-000834, pgs. 5-10
September 1979 to June 1980	59	n/a	PHD-000835, pgs. 5-10
September 1980 to June 1981	56	n/a	PHD-000257, pgs. 5-10
September 1981 to June 1982	51	n/a	PHD-000258, pgs. 5-10
September 1982 to June 1983	55	n/a	PHD-000836, pgs. 5-10
September 1983 to June 1984	53	n/a	PHD-000259, pgs. 5-11
September 1984 to June 1985	58	n/a	PHD-000260, pgs. 5-6, 9-12
September 1985 to June 1986	59	n/a	PHD-000261, pgs. 7-12
September 1986 to June 1987	56	n/a	PHD-000818, pgs. 5-7, 9-13
September 1987 to June 1988	59	n/a	PHD-000262, pgs. 5-7, 9-13
September 1988 to June 1989	48	n/a	PHD-000837, pgs. 5-7, 9-14

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

School Years	Special Programs Offered	Document Reference
1963 to 1989	Cooking, baking, meal preparation, sewing, laundry baby care, homemaking/general, sawmilling, woodworking, home construction, sheet metal work, welding motor mechanics, gardening, general maintenance, craft class, choir, first aid class, picnics, volleyball, skating, movies, class trips, school newspaper, music, speaking class, social studies, creative writing, boating, sports, physical education, mechanical drawing, typing, decoupage, radio electronics, bookkeeping and syllabics.	PHD-000817, pgs. 7, 11-14, 17-18, 21-32, 36 PHD-000821, pgs. 14, 19-24, 26-31 PHD-000800, pgs. 5, 14-22 PHD-000822, pgs. 11-17 PHD-000823, pgs. 20-24, 27-28 PHD-000824, pgs. 13-20 PHD-000825, pgs. 11-24 PHD-000826, pgs. 15-24 PHD-000827, pgs. 3, 12-25 PHD-000828, pgs. 14-24 PHD-000829, pgs. 15-23, 30 PHD-000830, pgs. 17-25 PHD-000831, pgs. 8, 17-26 PHD-000210, pg. 3 PHD-000832, pgs. 14-24 PHD-000833, pgs. 14-23 PHD-000834, pgs. 11-21 PHD-000835, pgs. 11-23 PHD-000836, pgs. 11-21 PHD-000818, pgs. 14-18, 20-22, 26 PHD-000837, pgs. 15-21 PHD-000257, pgs. 14-22, 28 PHD-000258, pgs. 11, 14-21, 24-25 PHD-000259, pgs. 14-23 PHD-000260, pgs. 14-24, 27 PHD-000261, pgs. 15-23 PHD-000262, pgs. 15-22, 32

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Date	Event	Document Reference
1962	When the IRS first opened the facilities available were a two classroom building, a 46' x 46' dormitory containing a girls dormitory 16' x 30' and a boys dormitory 16' x 30', a small kitchen and small dining room with two adjacent washrooms, two cabins for a shop and a small portable sawmill. The buildings were of log construction or rough board produced on the small sawmill. There was no electricity or water pressure system.	NCA-006746-0001
1964 to 1965	Students built a generator house during the year.	PHD-000821, pg. 30
1965 to 1966	Boys in one Shop class at the school built a 24' x 32' warehouse building made of aluminum.	PHD-000800
1966	The IRS enlarged its housing facilities when a modern fifty bed hostel, three staff houses and an electrical power plant were added. The staff houses were built by the students.	NCA-006746-0001
October 17, 1967	The Home economics, Shop and new recreation buildings were nearing completion.	PHD-000068
1969 to 1970	The yearbook notes that the library was separate from the classrooms. Also, the students in the shop class built a new Home Economics house.	PHD-000825, pgs. 11, 19
1975 to 1976	The boys in the Shop class built an addition to the dining hall, the girls' bedroom and basement at the IRS and also remodeled the kitchen and girls washroom.	PHD-000831, pg. 22
1976 to 1977	The students in the shop class built a second storey six-room addition to the ladies dormitory.	PHD-000832, pg. 21
Circa 1977	The Poplar Hill Development School campus contained the following: a school assembly hall complex, home economics classrooms, Principal's house, dorms for male staff, a student dorm and dining hall, a skating rink, staff family dwellings, dorm for female staff, gym – shop complex, a tractor storage building, sawmill, generator building and dock.	NCA-001733-0000
1981 to 1982	A large Shop building was put up by male students. The school site also contained a three storey classroom building. A warehouse woodshed was also completed as the boys building project for Shop class.	PHD-000258, pgs. 4, 17-18
1984 to 1985	The project that year for the boys Shop class was to remodel the men's dormitory by adding a second storey.	PHD-000260, pgs. 17-18

PHOTOS, PLANS AND LAYOUT

Date	Description	Document Reference
June 6, 1963	The buildings at the IRS were described as "crude" but were adequate with respect to the health of the children and the programs offered. The largest building contained two dormitories for boys on the ground floor, the girls' dormitory upstairs, a dining hall, kitchen, washroom and room for the supervisor. The building was entirely constructed from local material, as were most of the buildings. The classroom unit consisted of two classrooms with laundry and kitchen space for home economics in the basement. The upstairs contained staff quarters. There was no indoor plumbing so wash basins and outdoor toilets were used.	PHD-000017
July 1966	Sketch of IRS site; proposed new structures on IRS site	PHD-000221-0004 PHD-000221-0005
Circa 1977	Photograph of buildings at Poplar Hill Development School and map showing layout of buildings. The two storey school library assembly hall complex included three classrooms on ground level averaging	NCA-001733-0000

	658 square feet per room.	
February 1977	Photograph of classroom at the Poplar Hill Development School	PHD-000142
1982	Picture of boys dormitory, Shop and IRS school building from 1962; picture of dormitory and school from 1982.	PHD-000258, pg. 4

DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO SCHOOL INCIDENTS

To date, we are unaware of any convictions for abuse at Poplar Hill Development School or of any convicted abusers present at the school.

The following suggestions of abuse, listed chronologically, comprise all known identifiable complaints and/or allegations received by government officials and all available information regarding the follow-up and outcome.

Incidents (Physical)

1989 to 1991

Newspaper articles from the Mennonite Reporter from the years 1989 to 1991 indicate that the school was closed because of a dispute between the school management and the Nishnawbe Education Council over the use of corporal punishment. Allegations were made regarding the overly harsh physical punishment of pupils. A former staff member at Poplar Hill stated that spanking at the school was done with one person holding the child down on a table while another applied a leather strap. The Director of the Northern Lights Mission noted there “have been times when we disciplined too severely – like parents sometimes do.”

The Nishnawbe Education Council initiated an investigation into child abuse at the school, but as of December 1989 no one had come forward. Investigations were also carried out by the police and Family Services. A February 1991 newspaper article noted that the year-long police investigation into child abuse allegations at the Poplar Hill School produced no charges [PHD-000143; PHD-000144; PHD-000145; PHD-000173; PHD-000146; PHD-000147; PHD-000148.]

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1962 to 1970

According to a 1970 report, assigning summer projects for the students to do in their home communities had been a vital part of the practical program at the school since it first opened in 1962. Summer projects for some students in 1965 and 1966 included classes in sewing, cooking and carpentry [PHD-000220, NCA-006746-0001].

1964 The Regional School Superintendent wrote that children were only admitted to the school at Poplar Hill if approval was granted by parents [PHD-000028].

1967 The District School Superintendent noted that he received a couple of letters from parents who refused to send their children to the school. One parent “said he heard that the Mennonites mistreat the children...” [PHD-000065].

1967 to 1968

Principal’s Monthly Reports note that there were five non-Aboriginal students attending school at Poplar Hill IRS from September 1967 to June 1968 [PHD-000128; PHD-000200; PHD-000252; PHD-000255].

1977 *A Brief History of Northern Light Gospel Mission* noted that the buildings at the school complex were constructed almost entirely by students and teachers at the school as part of the education program [PHD-000142].

1989 to 1990

Last updated June 14, 2012

Newspaper articles from the Mennonite Reporter mentioned a “counseling room” or “punishment room, “described as a tiny closet at the school in which children were locked for hours at a time [PHD-000143; PHD-000145].

PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS

Name	Position	Tenure Dates
Clair E. Schnupp	Principal	1962 to 1966
Paul L. Miller	Principal	1966 to 1975
Kenneth Miller	Principal	1975 to 1985
James Byler	Administrator	1985 to 1989

Narrative Completed: October 20 2011
Narrative Updated: June 14, 2012

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