

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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**Sturgeon Lake IRS
School Narrative
July 7, 2005**

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

NAME OF SCHOOL AND VARIANTS

Sturgeon Lake IRS was also referred to as:

- Sturgeon Lake Boarding School [06020]
- Sturgeon Lake R.C. Residential School [04003]
- St. Francis Xavier's Mission [06020]
- St. Francis Xavier Boarding School [00137]
- St. Francis Xavier Indian Residential School [04003]
- St. Francois Xavier Indian Residential School [00298]
- minor variations of these names.

On occasion Sturgeon Lake IRS was referred to as the residential school at Calais [04475], or simply the school at Calais [00116].

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

- 1906 Work is begun on the school building [03181].
- 1907 Three Sisters of Providence arrive at the Sturgeon Lake mission on October 21, 1907. A week later, 25 boarders begin school under the Sisters [00087; 00042].
- 1959 The government gives approval for the establishment of a day school at Sturgeon Lake, and the government intends to close the residential school eventually [03013; 00004].
- 1959-60 The government establishes Namew Indian Day School, also known as Namew Lake Indian Day School, using existing Sturgeon Lake IRS classrooms; this space is to be rented from the church until a new school building can be built. The day school also rents the gym and manual training shop from the church [00563; 00564]. In effect, the government has taken over operation of the actual school activities occurring at the site of Sturgeon Lake IRS, while the church continues to run the student residence [00563; 60000].
- 1960 Government and church officials come to agreement “on the future of the Sturgeon Lake Residential School.” It is planned that the residence will close effective September 1, 1961 [01008]. It is also planned that for the 1960-61 school year, Grade 8 and 9 students who have been attending the Sturgeon Lake Residential School will attend the new separate school that is to be constructed at

the nearby town of Valleyview. At least some of the Grade 8 and 9 students do so in the fall [00568].

- 1961 Sturgeon Lake IRS closes at the end of June [00087]. However, the classrooms, gym, and manual training shop continue to be used by Namew Indian Day School; it is anticipated that the day school will use these facilities until at least the end of the 1961-62 school year [00567].
- 1964 It appears that the church will sell the school land and buildings to the Sturgeon Lake Band, under arrangements that will allow the church to continue to use the church building, convent, and teacherage [00413A]. However, it turns out that the church sells the property to private individuals [00389].
- 1967 The persons to whom the church sold the land did not fulfil the conditions of the purchase agreement, and ownership of the land has reverted back to the church. The church again seeks to sell the land to the Sturgeon Lake Band [60001].

MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL

- 1906 - 1959 The Oblates of Mary Immaculate manage the operation of Sturgeon Lake IRS [00087; 04213; 30273]. The Sisters of Charity of Providence are also involved in the day-to-day running of the school [00087; 00298; 00297]. The Vicar Apostolic of Grouard (also known as the Bishop of Grouard [or McLennan or Athabaska]) and the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Grouard are involved in various aspects of the management of the school, especially financial matters [06020; 04553; 04453; 03177]

The government contributes financially to the school by providing grant money each year, the size of the grant being based on the number of students. The government also pays a grant for the salary of a night watchman, provides school supplies and funds for building repairs, and sometimes contributes funds for the construction of new buildings [04514]. The government provides supervision for the school through such means as inspecting the school [00297] and approving the appointment of the principal [00116]. One document states that Sturgeon Lake IRS “is a church-owned school, operated by the Department in cooperation with the Oblate Order” [04087].

- 1959 - 1961 Namew Indian Day School is established by the government, with classes held in Sturgeon Lake IRS facilities until new school buildings can be built. The teachers are now government employees. The Sturgeon Lake student residence continues to be owned and operated by the church [00563; 00568; 60000].

SCHOOL BUILDINGS

It appears that the Sturgeon Lake IRS buildings were all church-owned until the government constructed a new building at the same site in the early 1960s for Namew Indian Day School [00047; 04087; 03012; 07742; 00535].

- 1907 The construction of the school continues. The main building is built of logs [00087; 04028].
- 1922 A new school building is constructed. The building is to contain two class rooms, [00126A;04028].
- 1925 A “large and substantial addition” to the school building has been completed [00161].
- 1929 A large addition to one of the school buildings is constructed. This new structure is to contain a boys’ dormitory, a boys’ hall, a boys’ dining hall, and a classroom [00218; 00219].
- 1933 The church asks the government for \$2,000 for “absolutely necessary repairs [sic]” to Sturgeon Lake IRS. “The girls’ [sic] building at that point threatens destruction but as we cannot tackle the problem of reconstruction we must do something [sic]” [04198].
- 1934 “Installation and refixing of the heating system” at Sturgeon Lake IRS is carried out [00268].
- 1935 “The building” is said to be “very dilapidated,” and “the dormitories are hardly fit for the children to sleep in” [00297].
- 1938 Repairs are to be made to the foundation of the boys’ building, which is also to be painted [00325].
- 1939 The main building, which houses the girls and the Sisters in charge, needs to be replaced since it is “collapsing.” The intention is to have the work done during the summer of 1940. It is noted that “the present school” was set up by the church through the financial help of supporters, “without any contribution from the Department.” However, donations have decreased because of “the financial crisis” and cannot be relied upon to provide the money needed to replace the main building [04036B].
- 1939 - 1940 A water system is installed and a well drilled [00581; 04052; 04068]
- 1940 A description is given of the proposed new building for the girls and Sisters. It is noted that none of the present school buildings has a concrete, brick, or stone foundation [06009]. The government approves the re-building of the root cellar [04068; 04069]. Cement and lumber are supplied by the government for the

construction of a foundation for the boys' building [04071; 04087]. The buildings, especially "the girls' wing," are said to be in a "dilapidated condition." The girls' building is heated by stoves and has for several years been a serious fire hazard [04087].

- 1941 The government gives authorization for the collection of materials for the eventual rebuilding of Sturgeon Lake IRS [04553].
- 1942 The government decides that "steps should be taken toward the reconstruction of the building" in which the girls live [04545A]. Shortly afterwards it is said that "extensive repairs" are being carried out at Sturgeon Lake IRS [04517]. However, in mid-year Sturgeon Lake school is said to be "in a state of dismal necessity" [00352]. In August it is noted that the actual construction of the new school building will not begin this year [04539].
- 1943 It is said that the school "is falling to ruin and has become a source of danger for the health of Indian children as well as a fire hazard." Some student deaths "last winter" had been said to be due to "the lack of comfort" resulting from poor heating. The government had therefore decided to pay for the supplies needed to rebuild the school [04553]. Work is begun on the construction of a new school building in which the girls and Sisters will be housed [04572].
- 1944 A new building containing the girls' and Sisters' dormitories has been built; asbestos shingle siding is used on the outside walls. The building measures 120 x 50 feet, and it has two storeys and a full basement [04569; 04572; 04587]. The school also acquires electricity [00087].
- 1947 The school acquires a telephone [00087].
- 1949 It is stated that "the lighting facilities in the classrooms in the Sturgeon Lake school are completely inadequate and ... there will almost certainly be serious damage to the children's eyes if the lighting is not improved." It is recommended that a larger generator be transferred from another residential school to Sturgeon Lake IRS so that brighter light can be produced for the classrooms [03085]. Construction is begun on a new barn, and a large portion of the work is completed [04446; 04696].
- 1952 The government accepts a contractor's bid for a job involving the addition of a dormer window to a classroom at the school [03047; 03044].
- 1953 The principal plans to have a cement foundation put under the east end of the boys' quarters [03036; 03032].
- 1954 The school buildings at Sturgeon Lake IRS are in very poor condition and "there would seem to be little justification for its replacement"[04457].

- 1955 It is noted that the school is likely to be converted to a four-classroom day school with accommodation for the teachers, although the project is not intended for this year [03031]. The Bishop has consented to an examination by an engineer to determine the possibility of converting the residential school to a day school [03026].
- 1956 There are plans, as of January, to build a “hall or Auditorium” “next summer” [03021]. During the course of the year a gymnasium and possibly a teacherage¹ are erected [00535A; 03015]. Also, an engineer notes that “due to the arrangement of structural members, partitions, etc.,” it would not be cost-effective to convert Sturgeon Lake IRS into a day school. The cost of the necessary renovations would equal, if not exceed, the cost of a new six-classroom block [03018].
- 1959 A fire inspection reveals a number of fire hazards in the school buildings [03015]. An electrical inspection reveals a number of changes that should be made “in the interests of safety to life and property” [03005].
- 1959-60 Namew Indian Day School is established and holds classes in Sturgeon Lake IRS classrooms; this space is to be rented from the church until a new school building can be built. The day school also rents the gym and manual training shop from the church [00563; 00564].
- 1960 “The dormitory building” is said to be “in extremely poor condition to the point where it is beyond repair.” It is recommended that Sturgeon Lake IRS be closed and that a new three-classroom day school be built on the same site [07742]. Some steps have been taken to reduce the fire hazard at the school. The school is requested to take further steps to reduce the danger of fire [03001].
- 1961 Sturgeon Lake IRS closes after the 1960-61 school year [00087]. The classrooms, the gym, and the manual training shop continue to be used by Namew Indian Day School. It is anticipated that these facilities will continue to be used for at least the 1961-62 school year [00567].
- 1964 It appears that the church will sell the school land and buildings to the Sturgeon Lake Band, under arrangements that will allow the church to continue to use the church building, convent, and teacherage [00413A]. However, it turns out that the church sells the property to private individuals [00389].

¹Although document 00535A, dated August 4, 1961, indicates that a teacherage was built in 1956, this date of construction may be incorrect. It is known that a teacherage was built in 1959 (see entry above), and it might be possible that this 1959 building is the teacherage referred to in document 00535A.

LAND

Location:

Sturgeon Lake IRS falls within Treaty Area 8 [Source - “Alberta Indian Residential Schools,” Resource Data Division, Alberta Environmental Protection, 1996].

The school was located on the property of the Roman Catholic mission on the shores of Sturgeon Lake. The property was surrounded by Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve land [00472A; 00396]. The nearest town was Calais, Alberta [04204; 00378A]. As of 1925, the nearest post office was Calais [00161A].

Ownership:

The church acquired ownership of the land before the Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve was formed. Later the property became surrounded by reserve land [00417].

1961-62 Namew Indian Day School constructs a three-classroom building on the same church property on which Sturgeon Lake IRS was located. A government official later suggests that it was “by mistake” that the school was built on church land [00396].

1964 It appears that the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Grouard will sell the school land and buildings to the Sturgeon Lake Band, under arrangements that will allow the church to continue to use the church building, convent, and teacherage. The land offered in this sale includes three adjacent lots totaling about 237 acres [00413A]. However, it turns out that the church sells the property to private individuals [00389]. A mid-1964 document created prior to the sale indicates that the Sturgeon Lake Roman Catholic Mission possesses about 310 acres of land [00396B].

1967 The persons to whom the church sold the land did not fulfil the conditions of the purchase agreement, and ownership of the land has reverted back to the church. The church again seeks to sell the land to the Sturgeon Lake Band [60001].

PHOTOS, PLANS AND OTHER MEDIA

RevItem#	Date	Description
00194	Undated	Sketch of building, part of which is labeled “old building” and part of which is labeled “[illegible] addition”
03093	Undated	Diagram of classroom, with room dimensions, light fixtures, and windows indicated

00478	February 3, 1939	Sketch of main buildings and proposed water intake pipeline at Sturgeon Lake Mission
03046	February 23, 1952	Plans of building renovation: "Proposed Changes in Present S[illegible], Sturgeon Lake Indian Residential School." This plan appears to be one submitted by Gateway Building Supplies Ltd. The government accepted this company's tender to build a dormer window for a Sturgeon Lake IRS building [03047; 03044].
00378A	Undated (January 20, 1964) ²	Diagram of property of Roman Catholic mission at Sturgeon Lake, with buildings indicated; photographs of teacherage, barn, garage, machine shop, machine shed, gymnasium, priest's house, convent, and church; aerial photograph of property; map showing location of mission on Sturgeon Lake

GENERAL ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME

Sturgeon Lake IRS often had some students who were not treaty Indians, and in many cases the federal government did not provide a grant to the school for these students. Also, the federal government established an authorized enrollment level, which varied from year to year, that specified the maximum number of treaty Indian students for which the federal government planned to provide a grant to the school. Therefore, the enrollment figures listed in many government documents reflect the number of students for which the government was providing a grant, not necessarily the total number of students attending the school. Furthermore, enrollment or attendance fluctuated somewhat over the course of a given year. There is thus noteworthy variation in the enrollment figures listed in different documents for a given period of time.

The figures provided below were primarily taken from a particular series of documents containing annual enrollment figures for the school, figures which for most years after 1921 appear to have been reported as of the end of the given calendar year. The enrollment reported in this series of documents is often higher than that stated in other documents, probably revealing that this series of documents reports all students present at the school, rather than just a particular category of students. It is believed that the figures provided below thus provide a reasonably consistent and complete picture of enrollment over the school's history.

²Although the database containing this document indicates the date to be "00/00/0000," the document itself is dated January 20, 1964.

1907	25 boarders
1908	25 students
1909	35 students
1910	36 students
1911	37 students
1912	29 resident students, 10 day students
1913	37 resident students, 7 day students
1914	28 resident students, 12 day students
1915	36 resident students, 10 day students
1916	43 resident students, 5 day students
1917	36 students
1918	24 students
1919	44 resident students, 5 day students
1920	51 resident students, 9 day students
1921	52 resident students, 7 day students
1922	68 resident students, 6 day students
1923	69 resident students, 7 day students
1924	77 resident students, 5 day students, 5 “quarter-pension” or “half-pension” students ³
1925	81 resident students, 5 day students, 4 “quarter-pension” or “half-pension” students
1926	76 resident students, 6 day students, 6 “quarter-pension” or “half-pension” students
1927	91 resident students, 6 day students, 4 “quarter-pension” or “half-pension” students
1928	89 resident students, 4 day students
1929	90 resident students, 9 day students
1930	76 resident students, 7 day students
1931	75 resident students
1932	83 resident students, 4 day students
1933	88 resident students, 3 day students
1934	83 resident students, 4 day students
1935	85 resident students, 10 day students
1936	86 resident students, 8 day students
1937	89 resident students, 8 day students
1938	92 resident students, 5 day students
1939	105 resident students, 6 day students
1940	96 resident students, 4 day students
1941	95 resident students, 5 day students
1942	85 resident students, 5 day students
1943	84 resident students, 3 day students
1944	76 resident students, 4 day students
1945	101 resident students, 24 day students

³The “quarter-pension” and “half-pension” students referred to here are students that a French document lists as students “au quart de pension” and “à la demi-pension.” These might have been students who boarded at the school for only part of each week.

1946	95 resident students, 17 day students
1947	103 resident students, 16 day students
1948	95 resident students, 11 day students
1949	103 resident students, 15 day students
1950	108 resident students, 4 day students
1951	98 resident students, 13 day students
1952	85 resident students, 16 day students
1953	116 students
1954	111 resident students, 16 day students
1955	102 resident students, 18 day students
1956	98 resident students, 30 day students
1957	104 resident students, 32 day students
1958	107 resident students, 25 day students
1959	107 resident students, 29 day students
1960	82 resident students, 21 day students

STUDENTS FROM OTHER RESERVES

Students from at least the following bands attended Sturgeon Lake IRS:

Cree of Sturgeon Lake, Cree of Slave Lake, Driftpile, Sucker Creek, Janvier, Michel, Bigstone, Horse Lake [Beaver Band of Horse Lake and Clear Hills, or Beavers of Dunvegan and Grande Prairie], Moberley Lake, Saulteau Band of East Moberley Lake, Slave Band of Fort Nelson, and Hudson Hope Band of Halfway River.

There may be alternate ways of spelling these band names.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

- Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan — also known as the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Grouard or historically as the Vicariate Apostolic of Grouard or Vicariate Apostolic of Athabaska [04553; 03177; 04453]
- Oblates of Mary Immaculate [30273; 04213]
- Oblate Indian-Eskimo Council (Indian Welfare and Training Commission) [04587; 04696]
- Sisters of Charity of Providence (often referred to as the Sisters of Providence) [00087; 00297]

WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

- | | |
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| 1911 | Agreement Between His Majesty the King and Right Rev. Emile Grouard, OMI, Regarding the Sturgeon Lake Boarding School [06020] |
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DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO SCHOOL INCIDENTS

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Health Issues:

- 1933 Two students die [U38-071006 [000-000]].
- 1934 A student enrolled in Sturgeon Lake IRS dies at home in August [U38-071018 [001-001]].
- 1935 In May it is said that an Edmonton newspaper has carried an article by an anonymous author in which it is alleged that there has been an epidemic of eye problems on the Sturgeon Lake reserve and a lack of medical care for this condition. The article is said to have been misleading, since discussions with the head RCMP officer at Sturgeon Lake, the responsible medical officer, and the principal of Sturgeon Lake IRS are said to have shown that “there was no illness of an epidemic nature such as was complained of” [04645].
- 1938 A doctor examining students at the school in October says that they are in very good health this year [04732]. In a letter offering a projection of the likely enrollment in 1945, the principal indicates that he expects that some children will die in the seven years leading up to that time. It is not clear whether he is referring to deaths that will occur at the school or deaths that will occur away from the school or among children who are not yet of school age [03092].
- 1940 Two students die in the April-June period [U38-071145 [001-001]].
- 1941 In December a student dies as a result of the measles and pneumonia [00047A].
- 1942 A number of students die in December — at least four [03102].
- 1943 At least three children died between January and June [03104; U38-071178 [000-000]]. A May 17 document indicates that some student deaths “last winter” had been said to be due to poor heating in the school [04553]. Two more children enrolled at Sturgeon Lake IRS die later in the year, one in October and one in December [03106].
- 1944 A student dies in January [03107]; another one dies in June [03108].
- 1945 A child enrolled at Sturgeon Lake IRS dies at home in April [03112].

- 1946 A student is discharged from the school in March; “[c]hild is dying” is the reason given for the discharge [U38-071260 [000-000]]. A student enrolled at Sturgeon Lake IRS dies in October [03118].
- 1947 A student enrolled at Sturgeon Lake IRS apparently dies in the first quarter of 1947 [03119; 03118].
- 1952 An influenza epidemic occurs at Sturgeon Lake IRS. It is reported in April that a quarantine has been imposed and classes suspended [06014].
- 1956 A measles epidemic occurs at the school in September [06011].

Miscellaneous Incidents:

- 1933 It is said that the parents of the Sturgeon Lake Reserve, being “discontented with the Rev. Principal for some ... immaterial reasons, which were not related with school affairs at all,” were planning to take “revenge” by not sending their children back to school in September. After a meeting between the parents, “the Father,” and the Indian Agent on August 30, the parents relented and brought their children to school, “and every one seemed ... satisfied and happy” [04599].
- 1938 A female student is discharged from the school at the end of January. A document reporting this discharge includes the comment “found pregnant” as the reason for discharge [U38-071081 [000-000]; U38-071083 [000-000]].
- 1940 Five boys run away from Sturgeon Lake IRS one evening in September. Four of the boys are found and brought back to school early the following evening. The fifth boy eludes searchers and travels to the Grande Prairie area to meet his father or stepfather, but he is brought back to the school within several days [00368; 00369]
- 1940 In December there is a trial at Sturgeon Lake involving two male students of Sturgeon Lake IRS. It is said that the two students “were sentenced to be transferred to Grouard School where they will be detained until they reach the age of sixteen, without the privilege of holidays ... they have been placed under suspended sentence and have been told by the judge that, if they committed any more [sic] offenses, they would be tried again before him for all their past crimes” [04776; 04777].
- 1941 A male student is “[d]ischarged on account of misbehaviour” [U38-071149 [000-000]].
- 1942 A male student is discharged due to “[i]ll-behaviour” [U38-071168 [000-000]].

Other Information:

- 1934-1936 The school receives permission from the government to have some of the older girls spend the majority of their in-school hours being trained in domestic science (cooking and sewing) rather than in academic work [U38-071017 [000-000]; 00297; 04009A; 04010].
- 1938 The government gives permission for three female students to remain at Sturgeon Lake IRS past the age of 16 since it is felt that they will be “morally endangered” if discharged from the school at the present time [U38-071104 [000-001]; U38-071104 [001-001]; U38-071105 [000-000]].
- 1947 The Bishop states “that the building of this school was a Government responsibility and that if the Church after pleading for years before the war and during the war finally consented to pay for this construction it was because the state of the old building created a constant threat to the health not to mention the comfort of the children and staff” [04632].

PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS

Name	Position	Tenure Dates
Father Jules M. Calais, OMI	Principal	1907 - April 1914
Father Paul Serrand, OMI	Principal	April 1914 - at least June 1914
Father Jules M. Calais, OMI	Principal	at least September 1914
Father Joseph Habay, OMI	Principal	October 1914 - at least June 1917
Father François Le Serrec	Principal	at least September 1917 - September 1919
Father René Hautin, OMI	Principal	September 1919 - December 1926
Father Cyprien Batie, OMI	Principal	1927 - March 1933
Father Louis Girard, OMI	Principal	March 1933 - August 1938
Father Henri Fournier, OMI	Principal	August 1938 - July 1941
Father Arsène Alac, OMI	Principal	August 1941 - January 1945
Father Louis-Joseph Giguère, OMI	Principal	January 1945 - July 1946
Father Nicolas Roué, OMI	Principal	August 1946 - January 1951
Father Louis Paul Lachance, OMI	Acting Principal	May 1951 - at least July 1951
Father Nicolas Roué, OMI	Principal	August 1951 - at least March 1961

Name	Position	Tenure Dates
Sister Clement	Principal of Namew Indian Day School	at least as of December 1959
Sister Dominic Mary	Principal of Namew Indian Day School	November 1960 - June 1961

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

