

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.

**Thunderchild Indian Residential School
IAP School Narrative**

NAME IN THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT (Schedule E/F)

Thunderchild (Delmas, St. Henri)

OTHER NAMES KNOWN AS (AKAs)

1901 to 1924	Thunderchild (Roman Catholic) (Indian) Boarding School [THR-000113-0000; THR-000145; DRS-050007; THR-000150; THR-000162]
1923 to 1948	Thunderchild (Indian) Residential School [THR-000081; THR-000174; THR-000220-0001; THR-000231]
1903 to 1927	St. Henry’s Boarding School [THR-000119; THR-000049, pg. 7; THR-000307-0000]
1928	St. Henry’s Roman Catholic Indian Residential School [THR-000305-0000]
1920; 1937	Delmas (Boarding) School [THR-000147; THR-000201]

LOCATION

The Thunderchild IRS was situated at Delmas, Saskatchewan, 18 miles west of Battleford, on the main line of the Canadian National Railway [THR-000310]. The IRS was not located on reserve land.

PROVINCE/TERRITORY

Saskatchewan

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.

March 25, 1901 to January 13, 1948

OPERATING DATES CONTEXT

The Thunderchild IRS in Delmas opened on March 25, 1901 [THR-000011 pg. 10; THR-000318, pg. 1-2]. The IRS burned down on January 13, 1948, and all the children were sent home. Plans were discussed by the federal government to continue the IRS in a temporary setting, however, this was never carried out [THR-000266-0002; THR-000242; THR-000099; THR-000243; THR-000247-0000; THR-000247-0001].

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Roman Catholic Church

1901 to 1948	Oblate Reverend Fathers of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) [THR-000011, pg. 12-13; THR-000064, pg. 6; THR-000159; THR-
--------------	---

1901 to 1948 Sisters of the Assumption [THR-000017, pg. 4; THR-000027, pg. 5; THR-000049, pg. 2; THR-000268; THR-000363, pg. 88-89]

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Date	Event	Document Reference
1901	While awaiting the completion of a permanent building, the Thunderchild IRS opened on March 25, 1901, in a house belonging to the Reverend Fathers. The new IRS building was completed around July 1901. It was located on property owned by the Church outside the Thunderchild Reserve. The building contained a classroom, refectory, two dormitories, staff quarters and a kitchen.	THR-000318, pg. 1-2 THR-000011 pg. 7, 10 THR-000113-0000 THR-000112
1909	The IRS began to accommodate over twenty non-Indian boarders, in addition to its regular Indian boarders, to help fund operating expenses.	THR-000041, pg. 8-9 THR-000147 THR-000152
1910	The federal government was in support of increasing the pupilage at the Thunderchild IRS and was aware that "mixed blood" children were also in attendance at the IRS.	THR-000131
1923	Residents of the Thunderchild IRS were Indian and non-Indian. The Principal informed the federal government that as soon as possible the "white part" of the IRS would be done away with and all the buildings would be used for Indian work.	THR-000152 THR-000314
1924	By December 1924, the Thunderchild IRS no longer housed non-Indian children; the south wing formerly used to accommodate them was remodeled and used exclusively as quarters for the Sisters and Indian girls.	THR-000162 THR-000310
1925	No farming operations were carried out at the IRS. The federal government stressed the importance of having boys at the IRS learn farming skills, and would not increase pupilage at the IRS until farming operations were added to the curriculum.	THR-000310 THR-000163
1929	Farming instruction was still not part of the IRS curriculum. The Acting Principal at the IRS, a Sister, advised the federal government in June that she was strongly opposed to farming instruction and that parents did not want their children working on a farm.	THR-000174 THR-000176 THR-000173
April 1, 1934	The Sisters were responsible for managing the operations inside the IRS, and for supplying teachers and domestic staff. The general management of the IRS was the responsibility of the Oblate Reverend Fathers of Mary Immaculate. April 1934, the Oblate Fathers assumed control of managing the IRS and its financial affairs.	THR-000268 THR-000269 THR-000290-0001
1948	The Thunderchild IRS was destroyed by fire on January 13, 1948. All pupils were evacuated safely and were returned to their home communities.	THR-000266-0002 THR-000231 THR-000242 THR-000244

EDUCATION OF STUDENTS

Grades taught at the Indian residential school

School Years	Grades offered	Document Reference
1901 to 1902	Grades 1 to 2	BVL-003123
1902 to 1903	Grades 1 to 3	THR-000021, pg. 5
1903 to 1905	Grades 1 to 4	THR-000023, pg. 10-11 THR-000027, pg. 2-3
1905 to 1906	Grades 1, 3, 5	THR-000032, pg. 2-3
1906 to 1907	Grades 1 to 2, 4 to 5	THR-000033, pg. 2-3
1907 to 1908	Grades 1 to 6	THR-000037, pg. 2-3
1908 to 1909	Grade 1, 3, 4 and 6	THR-000041, pg. 5-6
1909 to 1912	Grades 1 to 4 and 6	THR-000045, pg. 5-6 THR-000049, pg. 4-5 THR-000055, pg. 3-4
1912 to 1913	Grades 1 to 6	THR-000060, pg. 5-6
1913 to 1914	Grades 1 to 5	CJC-000393
1914 to 1915	Grades 1 to 3, 5 to 6	CJC-000398
1915 to 1921	Grades 1 to 6	CLD-000895, pg. 3-4 CJC-000408 CJC-000409 THR-000079
1921 to 1922	Grades 1 to 4	CJC-000412
1922 to 1930	Grades 1 to 6	CJC-000422 THR-000083 THR-000084 THR-000085 THR-000087 FGA-000650, pg. 10 THR-000089 THR-000090
1930 to 1932	Grades 1 to 7	THR-000091 THR-000092
1932 to 1933	Grades 1 to 8	GUY-050009
1933 to 1935	Grades 1 to 9	THR-000094 THR-000095
1935 to 1936	Grades 1 to 7 and 9	THR-000096
1936 to 1939	Grades 1 to 9	TAY-004471 THR-000097 THR-000098
1939 to 1940	Kindergarten, Grades 1 to 8	THR-000712, pg. 1, 8
1940 to 1948	No information found	

Other Schools Attended by Residents

No Information found

GENERAL ENROLLMENT STATISTICS OVER TIME

School Years	Number of Residents	If applicable, day scholars	Document Reference
1901 to 1902	15	No information found	BVL-003123
1902 to 1903	17	No information found	THR-000021, pg. 5
1903 to 1904	20	No information found	THR-000023, pg. 10-11
1904 to 1905	22	No information found	THR-000027, pg. 2-3
1905 to 1906	20	No information found	THR-000032, pg. 2-3
1906 to 1907	20	No information found	THR-000033, pg. 2-3
1907 to 1908	20	No information found	THR-000037, pg. 2-3
1908 to 1909	21	No information found	THR-000041, pg. 5-6
1909 to 1910	21	No information found	THR-000045, pg. 5-6

Last updated October 30, 2012

1910 to 1911	21	No information found	THR-000049, pg. 4-5
1911 to 1912	25	No information found	THR-000055, pg. 3-4
1912 to 1913	26	No information found	THR-000060, pg. 5-6
1913 to 1914	28	No information found	CJC-000393
1914 to 1915	35	No information found	CJC-000398
1915 to 1916	35	No information found	CLD-000895, pg. 3-4
1916 to 1917	41	No information found	CJC-000406
1917 to 1918	41	No information found	CJC-000408
1918 to 1919	42	No information found	CJC-000409
1919 to 1920	48	No information found	THR-000078
1920 to 1921	51	No information found	THR-000079
1921 to 1922	63	No information found	CJC-000412
1922 to 1923	71	No information found	CJC-000422
1923 to 1924	73	No information found	THR-000083
1924 to 1925	98	No information found	THR-000084
1925 to 1926	109	No information found	THR-000085
1926 to 1927	116	No information found	THR-000087
1927 to 1928	119	No information found	FGA-000650, pg. 10
1928 to 1929	111	No information found	THR-000089
1929 to 1930	105	No information found	THR-000090
1930 to 1931	128	No information found	THR-000091
1931 to 1932	130	No information found	THR-000092
1932 to 1933	121	No information found	GUY-050009
1933 to 1934	120	No information found	THR-000094
1934 to 1935	123	No information found	THR-000095
1935 to 1936	127	No information found	THR-000096
1936 to 1937	139	No information found	TAY-004471
1937 to 1938	151	No information found	THR-000097
1938 to 1939	141	No information found	THR-000098
1939 to 1940	126	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 23
1940 to 1941	124	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 29
1941 to 1942	125	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 42
1942 to 1943	113	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 51
1943 to 1944	109	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 63
1944 to 1945	118	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 72
1945 to 1946	123	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 80
1946 to 1947	127	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 87
1947 to 1948	120	No information found	THR-000363, pg. 100

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

School Years	Special Programs Offered	Document Reference
1901 to 1902	Boys took care of the garden and the farm animals and girls received instruction in cooking, laundry work, needlework, and knitting. For recreation, children played football, skipped rope, raced, and played other games.	THR-000017, pg. 6-7
1904 to 1905	Girls were taught housework and assisted in the kitchen; boys learned farming and gardening. Children played	THR-000027, pg. 4-5, 6-7

Last updated October 30, 2012

	football, bows and arrows and swings.	
1908 to 1909	Boys looked after horses and cows and girls were taught housework, sewing, mending, washing clothes, and cooking.	THR-000041, pg. 8-9
1910 to 1911	Boys were taught farming, gardening, and shoe repair and helped in the laundry. Girls were taught domestic work like mending, knitting and making clothes. For recreation children enjoyed coasting, running, baseball and football.	THR-000049, pg. 9-10
1911 to 1912	Boys were taught how to care for livestock, milk cows, and garden and girls were taught housekeeping (cooking, bread making, milking, butter making, sewing, knitting, mending and making clothes). For recreation children coasted, raced, and played football and baseball.	THR-000055, pg. 5, 7
1924 to 1925	In addition to regular studies, there were classes in sewing, and knitting. The IRS also had a girls' mandolin band.	THR-000310
1925	No farming operations were carried out at the IRS.	THR-000310 THR-000163
1935 to 1936	There was a girls' orchestra at the IRS.	THR-000437-0000, pg. 2

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Date	Event	Document Reference
1901	The IRS first operated in a house owned by the Reverend Fathers while a new IRS building was under construction. The new IRS building was completed around July 1901, and measured 36' x 28', and contained a classroom, refectory, two dormitories, staff rooms, and a 14' x 16' kitchen. There was also a 12' x 16' laundry building and an 8' x 8' pantry at the IRS site.	THR-000318, pg. 2 THR-000113-0000 THR-000011, pg. 10
1902	A new 16' x 3' pantry, a 12' x 16' shed, two summer houses and a swing were built without funding from the federal government.	THR-000017, pg. 6
1907 to 1909	A three storey annex measuring 36' x 28' was added to the south end of the main IRS building during 1907-1908. The annex contained a dormitory for boys, a refectory and a classroom. The third storey of the annex was completed in the fall of 1908 and served as a dormitory for non-Aboriginal girls. The main IRS building was two and a half stories high.	THR-000037, pg. 5 THR-000041, pg. 8-9
1913 to 1914	During the year, the IRS was extensively renovated. A concrete floor was placed in the basement and ventilation facilities were improved. An infirmary was constructed in the main IRS building.	THR-000134 THR-000064, pg. 6
1919	In October, the IRS Principal requested an increase in pupilage from 40 to 50 since an additional five rooms for pupils had been added to the IRS building. One room measured 14' x 22', while the other four rooms all measured 14' x 15'. The increase in pupilage was granted by the federal government, but under the condition that the addition be used for Roman Catholic children from the Thunderchild Reserve and not for non-Aboriginal children.	THR-000143 THR-000144 THR-000145
1920	With the new addition, the IRS could provide adequate	THR-000146

	accommodation for at least 90 children. The IRS was described as a building in three sections.	THR-000147
1923	The main IRS building contained two three storey wings added to the north and south ends. The wing on the south end of the IRS was used for non-Aboriginal boarders and staff quarters. The main IRS building and north wing accommodated Indian children.	THR-000314
1924 to 1925	By December 1924, the south wing at the IRS formerly used to house non-Indian children was remodeled and the quarters were used exclusively for Indian girls and the Sisters. There were five dormitories in total at the IRS – one for girls, two for boys, a spare dormitory, and a small one used in case of sickness. The federal government built a new cow barn at the IRS during the year.	THR-000162 THR-000310
1935	In the Fall of 1935, an 18' x 40' two storey addition to the main IRS building was constructed. The addition contained dining rooms, dormitories, and an infirmary.	THR-000248 THR-000437-0000
1936	Federal government correspondence in October 1936, noted that the Thunderchild IRS building was of wooden construction and though alterations and improvements had been made over the years the IRS building was unsuitable and "badly arranged inside;" remodeling and making further repairs would be a waste of funds. Water supply was inadequate and the building was deemed a fire hazard.	THR-000199
1947	The IRS Principal wrote to the federal government in October 1947, urging the replacement of the IRS building instead of enlarging the building. He noted that since the building had been enlarged five different times it would be practically impossible to make another satisfactory addition. Two classrooms were held in the main building, but four were necessary. The primary and junior classes were held in the playrooms. There was also no infirmary at the IRS at that time.	THR-000230
1948	The main building at the Thunderchild IRS was destroyed by fire on January 13, 1948. The workshop and ice house buildings were also lost in the fire. The IRS barns were salvaged. The Thunderchild IRS was not rebuilt and remained closed after the fire.	THR-000266-0002 THR-000231 THR-000235 THR-000242 THR-000244 THR-000247-0000 THR-000247-0001

PHOTOS, PLANS AND LAYOUT

Date	Description	Document Reference
1924	The three storey (south) wing at the IRS used as quarters for the girls and the Sisters measured 45' x 51'. The girls dormitory measured 45' x 51' x 8' high; two dormitories for boys measured 56' x 32'; a spare dormitory was 32' x 28' and a small dormitory used in case of sickness measured 28' x 28'.	THR-000162
1925	The main IRS building had laundry, a bakery, and supply rooms in the basement. A classroom and dormitories for boys were located in the north wing of the main IRS building. The south wing of the main IRS building was the largest.	THR-000310

	The main floor contained a music room, a private dining room, a dining room for girls, and a recreation room for girls. The south wing also contained a sewing room, staff quarters, the chapel, and a dormitory for girls containing 48 beds.	
1926	<p>An estimate for installation of lighting equipment at the IRS in 1926 provided a description of the layout of the main building. Specific wings were not identified in the document.</p> <p>The first floor of the IRS had a recreation room, a dining room for girls, the kitchen, and the pantry. The second floor had a dining room for the Fathers, a dining room for the Sisters, and a Sisters' room. The third floor had a chapel, a two guest rooms, plus a dormitory for girls.</p> <p>In another part (wing) of the Thunderchild IRS building, the first floor contained a kitchen entrance, a sewing room, a potato room, a preserving room, a pantry, a dining room for boys, an ironing room, and three classrooms. The second floor had two dormitories for boys, an infirmary and a balcony. The third floor had a dormitory for boys, a dormitory for the Sisters, a girls' dormitory, and an attic.</p> <p>The barn was approximately 300 feet from the main IRS building; the rink for boys was 50 feet from the IRS; the rink for small boys was about 350 feet away and the rink for girls was 150 feet away from the main IRS building. A meat house was 40 feet from the main building.</p>	THR-000299
1926	Sketch of outline of the IRS building, including dimensions of various sections.	THR-000295
1927	<p>Two classrooms were situated on the first floor of the main IRS building along with the dining room for boys, and work rooms. On the second floor was a sick bay and partial dormitory. The half storey above the other floors in the main building served as quarters for the Sisters.</p> <p>In the north wing was a junior classroom on the ground floor, and the two upper floors housed dormitories for boys.</p>	THR-000306
Circa 1946	Photograph of the exterior of the IRS and the IRS Principal.	THR-000418
1947	A letter from the IRS Principal to the federal government outlined the sizes of some of the rooms at the IRS as of October 1947: a dormitory for 47 girls was 49' x 33' x 7'; the sewing room was 24' x 16' x 8' and accommodated 30 girls; the playroom was 36' x 24' x 9' for 60 children; the refectory was 24' x 24' x 9' for 60 children; a classroom was 26' x 18' x 9' for 30 children; and the kitchen measured 24' x 18' x 9'.	THR-000230
1949	Shows the IRS ruins in proximity to other buildings.	THR-000229

DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO SCHOOL INCIDENTS

To date, we are unaware of any convictions for abuse at the Thunderchild IRS 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 (Sexual)

No information found

- 1937 A father pulled two of his children out of the IRS following an incident in which he alleged that the Sister Superior slapped both children across the face in front of him. A follow-up investigation was conducted by the federal government in which the Sister Superior gave her account of the situation. The Sister stated that she had held one of the boys back by the arms when he tried to leave the IRS with his father, and when the boy yelled out, she covered his mouth with his own hand [THR-000219-0000; THR-000219-0001; THR-000220-0000; THR-000222; THR-000225-0000; THR-000225-0001; THR-000225-0002].
- 1990 A former Superintendent of Education official with the Department of Indian Affairs, Saskatchewan, wrote a paper on the Thunderchild IRS that alleged incidents of severe physical abuse (including that a boy had been beaten to death by IRS staff) punishments, poor and insufficient food, and sickness at the IRS. An RCMP investigation into the alleged death of a child through beating concluded that the child died of pneumonia [THR-000251-0000; THR-000251-0001; THR-000252-0000; THR-000252-0001].

Incidents (Student on Student)

No information found

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 1913 An epidemic of measles broke out at the IRS in September and some of the children were quarantined [THR-000318, pg. 135-136].
- 1918 Scarlet fever broke out at the IRS in January [THR-000318, pg. 171].
- 1935 Measles broke out at the IRS in October, so the IRS was quarantined [THR-000318, pg. 250].
- 1936 The water supply at the Thunderchild IRS was a cause of considerable concern for some time. Drinking water was pumped directly from the Saskatchewan River by the Canadian National Railway. The IRS Principal noted that the water was not fit for consumption [THR-000198-0000; THR-000198-0001].

PRINCIPALS/ADMINISTRATORS

Name	Position	Tenure Dates
Reverend Father H. Delmas, O.M.I.	Principal	March 1901 to June 1911
Reverend Father A. Watelle, O.M.I.	Principal	June 1911 to December 1923
Reverend Father Joseph Portier, O.M.I.	Principal	December 1923 to September 1927 In the winter of 1926, the Principal was absent for several weeks on account of poor health and during his absence the Sister Superior was in full charge [THR-000306, pg. 2].
Reverend Father Joseph Angin, O.M.I.	Principal	September 1927 to March 1930
Reverend Father D. Dubois, O.M.I.	Principal	March 1930 to January 1932
Reverend Father Victor LeGoff, O.M.I.	Principal	January 1932 to August 1933
Reverend Father O. Allard, O.M.I.	Principal	August 1933 to December 1936
Reverend Father Joseph Angin, O.M.I.	Principal	December 1936 to August 1946

Last updated October 30, 2012

Reverend Father George Roussel, O.M.I.	Principal	August 1946 to August 1947
Reverend Father Jean Baptiste Cabana, O.M.I.	Principal	August 1947 to January 1948

Narrative Completed: August 23, 2012
Narrative Updated: October 30 2012

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

