

S. J. McKee Archives



Birtle Indian Residential School fonds

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Part Of: RG 5 Western Manitoba Manuscript Collection
Description Level: Collection
Accession Number: 10-1997
GMD: textual records
Date Range: 1888-1898
Physical Description: 2 cm (one volume)

History /

Biographical:

The Birtle Indian Residential School was opened by the Presbyterian Mission on December 3, 1888. Prior to that date, there had been a school allocated within the Birtle district for the Bird-Tail Sioux within Treaty 4. The new boarding school was located within the town limits of Birtle along the Bird-Tail River. The school was made of stone, was three stories high (not counting the basement), and was designed to accommodate fifty students. Connected to the school was thirty acres of land. The main building consisted of the school room, refectory, kitchen, and boys and girls dormitory. Besides the main school building, there was a barn that could accommodate fifteen head of cattle, a root-house and a small shed in which the parents would keep their ponies in the winter when they would come to visit the children. In the front of the residence there was a square piece of ground fenced off which consisted of a lawn and flower garden. The back of the residence was graveled for twenty yards. A garden of four acres was also connected with the school where vegetables were grown for use at the school.

Upon the opening of the school, there was considerable opposition on behalf of the parents as to the children being lodged and boarded such a substantial distance away from the greater Native population. This dissipated as the school gained acceptance within the Native community and attendance gradually increased as a result.

The headmaster at the original Bird-Tail school at the time of its assimilation into the Birtle Indian Residential School was J.D. Burgess. The first principle of the Birtle Indian Residential School was Rev. G.G. McLaren. He held the position from 1888 until November 1894, when he was replaced by Neil Gilmour. William J. Small became principle in 1896, and remained in that position until 1901.

The principal studies at the school were reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling and drawing. Although there were no trades associated with the school, the students were instructed in basic industries. The students also received moral training at the boarding schools. Girls were instructed in the branches of housework (washing, ironing, scrubbing, baking, cooking, sewing, knitting, tailoring, dressmaking, milking and butter-making). Boys were instructed in gardening, caring for stock, sawing, chopping and splitting wood, and were expected to help with the carpentry needs around the building. Special attention was also given to ethics and speaking English in class. There was also extensive religious training. Students were expected to attend church at least once each Sabbath in addition to their morning and evening worship and the study of the Bible and catechism in class.

During the summer the students participated in an abundance of outdoor exercise and recreation. The boys played a variety of sports, including baseball and soccer. The girls were allowed to go on long walks in the country or were given free time outdoors to take part in whatever they desired. Certain students exhibited a musical flare by playing instruments such as the madolin or the harmonica. One student, Hugh McKay, even worked part time at the local printing press during his tenure at the school. In the winter, students participated in ice-skating twice a week and the boys were allowed to play football for an hour a day. The girls could go on their walks and two or three times a week were taken for a drive a few miles into the country. There were two large playrooms within the main building for use during bad weather or when it was too cold outside for recreation during the winter.

Custodial History:

Fonds was accessioned by the McKee Archives in 1997. Prior custodial history is unknown.

Scope and Content:

Fonds consists of one attendance register from the Birtle Indian Residential School for the years 1888-1898. The total number of students within the register is 133. The attendance record covers the student's name, the date of their admission, their age, "full or half blood" Native status, tribe (ie. Sioux), band (ie. Bird-Tail Sioux), parents' names and father's rank, whether the parents were living or dead, parents' religion, places and periods of previous education and educational level of the student at the time of their registration. The average annual attendance at the school was forty-five students.

Students include (listed in the order in which they appear in the register): Elizabeth Benjamin; Arthur Johnston; Hagar Bunntec; Susan Hunter; Julia Eastman; Dayar David; Charlie Hanchia; Louis Eastman; Andrew Ben; Irad Bunn; Cilas Bohha; Ellen Benjamin; Carolyn Simpson; Joseph Charles; Esau Thunder; Odes Thunder; Maggie Ben; Angus Bone; Duncan Burgess; Nobaire Bone; Susan Gambler; Hugh McKay; George Bird; Mary Boyer; Alice Matheson; William Bone; Jeremiah Bone; Thomas Blackbird; Ellen Bone; Dwight Gambler; Joseph Ben; Smauel Benjamin; Charlie Cote; James Cote; Elizabeth Bone; Peter Ondie Burgess; Gilbert Walker; Frances Enoch; Isabel McKay; Norman Brandon; Jessie Brandon; Rosie Morrisau; Alex Tanner; Francis Tanner; Charlie Tanner; Jane Bone; Willis Boyer; Joseph Tanner; Gilbert Boyer; Mary Jane Tanner; Archy McDonald; Katie Brown; Bessie Brown; Tina Siaton; John Hunter; Nora Best; Lexy Smith; Nannie Jandrew; Eva Hunter; Anne Ben; Marisha Thunder; Ralph Kerr; Maggie Cook; Frank Sealton; Louis Chisholm; Lydia Nakaloo; Agnes Minnie; John Assinnewasis; Lizzie Sunguish; Hattie Sunguish; Jim Takakowewewe; Horace Takakowewewe; Nillie Yellowbird; Elizabeth Nakatoo; Alexander Brandon; Fred Brandon; Susan Blackbird; Jacob Blackbird; Harry Menlick Manshuse; Ellen McKay; George Hunter; Herbert Menlick Oliver; Flora Bird; Lucy Takakowewewe; Amos Hui Naste; Younge Singus; Susette Blackbird; Nellie Bunn; Daisy Bunn; Victoria Brandon; Janet Ashlakeesie; Mary Nubris; Bertha Hanshnu; Laura Bone; John Desparles; Okerta Desparles; Emma Assissipenace; Maggie Bearbull; Lucy Eosisamuswa; Robert Bluebird; Willie Seaton; Cahrlie Singoosh; Seclonia Mekis; Fanny Singoosh; Birtha McWeg?; Jen Eescanigah; Ethel Messegnot; Patrick Bone; Joseph Mekas; Magie Kalropunace; Augris Mekas; Sarah Wawapenace; Walter Longelaw; Eva ShaManilo Wigwam; Elsie Blackbird; Jen Ercock; Alesi Flett; Fred Longclaws; Marie Macheantie; Annie Clare; Flossie Longclaws; Andrew Pewapucolenu; David Bunn; Elizabeth Penapeccolimee; and Peter Rattlesnake.

Notes:	Description by Cory Anderson (1999). A copy of his finding aid and the essay he wrote on the Birtle Indian Residential School are located in the Birtle Industrial School fonds file (Finding aid drawer in the McKee Reading Room). The Sioux people who attended the Birtle Indian Industrial School originated in Minnesota and came to Canada following the Minnesota Sioux War of 1862. The history of the Dakota people in the Canadian Northwest is described in "The Dakota of the Canadian Northwest: Lessons for Survival" by Peter Douglas Elias (1988).
Storage Location:	1997 accessions
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Related Material:	Archival records RG10 from the Dept. of Indian Affairs / [microform] Issued by the Public Archives of Canada, Reference E78. C2P81 provides a link to records held in Library and Archives Canada for which microfilm copies exist in the John E. Robbins Library. The administrative records of the Birtle Indian Residential School may be found in this collection.