

Case Study Two

Haisla parents protest, Kitamaat, 1922

Documents in the Case

1. Report of Indian Agent Iver Fougner to Department of Indian Affairs, June 15, 1922
2. Report of RCMP Corporal R. W. Clearwater, June 13, 1922

Background

These two reports were written after parents of students living at the Elizabeth Long Memorial Home refused to send their children back to the boarding home. This institution was different from most residential schools at that time. It was on the Kitamaat Reserve, and the students who lived there attended classes at the day school. However, after 1917, the two groups were separated and the day students went for half a day and the home students the other half day. Life in the home was similar to the regimented life in other Indian Residential Schools.

Kitamaat village was an isolated community in 1922. It sits at the head of Douglas Channel, a 90 km inlet and in 1922 was very remote from the coastal shipping routes. Many people of the community supported the idea of the boarding home because it meant their children could receive an education while they went about important economic activities of fishing, hunting and trapping. This support implies a level of trust in the church and government to treat their children with respect and care.

Iver Fougner was Indian Agent of the Bella Coola Indian Agency, which in 1922 covered all the coast from Kitamaat in the north, to Rivers Inlet in the south. Fougner lived in Bella Coola, which itself is at the head of a long inlet. He had his own boat which he used to travel throughout the agency. The nearest doctors were in Prince Rupert or Bella Bella.

Historical Notes

- This event takes place soon after the Indian Act was changed to require all First Nations children to attend school. If parents refused to send them they were threatened with imprisonment or other legal action.
- RCMP: Between 1920 and 1950 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was a special federal police force. Its main activities were enforcement of narcotics laws and security and intelligence work. This included overseeing regulations under the Indian Act.
- The \$20 fine paid by John Adams would be worth between \$500 to \$1000 today.
- Medical Knowledge: Meningitis is a viral or bacterial infection of the brain and spinal chord. It most commonly strikes teenagers. Its symptoms include fever, seizures and death if untreated. Today it is treated with antibiotics, but these were unknown in 1922.
- RCMP Corporal Ralph Wesley Clearwater was a 27 year old World War One veteran.

Digging Deeper

Sources for more information about the history of the Elizabeth Long Memorial Home:

- United Church Residential School Archive Project. History of the home online: <http://thechildrenremembered.ca/schools-history/kitamaat/>
- *The Letters of Margaret Butcher: Missionary-Imperialism on the North Pacific Coast* by Mary-Ellen Kelm, University of Calgary Press, 2006. Margaret Butcher was a nurse at the Elizabeth Long Memorial Home from 1916 to 1919. Her letters to family and friends describe the home and village life in that time period.

Further documents in the case study

- Dr. Darby, whose headquarters was the hospital at Bella Bella, visited Kitamaat village after the parent's protest. His report is found online in the DIA School Files, reel 8773, pages 1632-1634. He made several recommendations. You can read the government's reaction to the recommendations on pages 1636 and 1637.

Discussion Questions

1. What triggered the parent protest?
2. What action did the community take before they carried out the protest?
3. What complaints did the parents have about the school?
4. Comment on Indian Agent Fougner's statement, "Indian children, in such circumstances, from diffidence, seldom or never speak, when questioned by white people."
5. Why do you think Corp. Clearwater added the comment, "I might mention here that [Edward] Grey is a very well educated Indian, and that he has some knowledge of the Law"?
6. What arguments did the Indian Agent and the RCMP use try to convince the Haisla people to send their children back to school?
7. What conditions did the community demand before they sent their children back to the school?
8. What evidence is there of the community's willingness to put their trust in the school?

DOCUMENT 2-1

389700 -
INDIAN AGENT'S OFFICE

Bella Coola, B.C.



June 15th. 1922. 19

568646

IN YOUR REPLY REFER TO No. 52/1.
ALSO
TO DATE OF THIS LETTER


 Sir,—

I have the honor to report that during the early part of May there was serious disturbance in the Boarding School at Kitimat. Miss Ida M. Clarke, the principal was at the time in Vancouver for a month's holiday; and the school was in charge of one of the teachers, Miss Hortop.

The immediate cause of the trouble was that a pupil, Hannah Maitland, adopted daughter of Wm. Grant, became ill, and the parents alleging ill-treatment took the girl to their own home in the village: here she died two days afterward, namely on May the 8th.

The whole village became greatly excited; and, when the pupils were allowed to go for a visit to their homes, as has been the custom every Saturday afternoon, the children did not return to the school.

Notice of this was sent to the principal in Vancouver, and to this office, said information arriving here May 28th. Miss Clarke at the same time came to Bella Coola from Vancouver; and we left for Kitimat on the 31st, calling at Ocean Falls for

Secretary, Dep't of Indian Affairs,
Ottawa.

Source: DIA School Files C-8773 pp 1493-1496

2.
Corpl. Clearwater, R.C.M.P.

We arrived at Kitimat June 4th. and found only five pupils in the Boarding School.

The next day a meeting was held with the natives, at which also were present: Miss Ida Clarke, the principal, Miss S.E. Alton, field matron, Rev. E. Couldray, missionary, constables Clearwater and Sutherland, besides the Indian agent.

Several Indians spoke and complained that the school was injurious to the health of the pupils, that there was not proper medical service, and that the children were not properly fed or clothed. One made the statement that of all the girls who had attended the school 49 have died, and 50 are alive.

Miss Clarke, the principal, and Miss Alton, the field matron replied to the charges of the Indians. Corpl. Clearwater, and the Indian agent also spoke to the meeting of the rights of the Indians to make complaints, if they had cause for it; but they should not take the matter in their own hands: that both the Indians and the school had rights that must be respected. On behalf of the Department I promised the natives that a physician would visit the school after the fishing season, and examine the children, and sanitary conditions in the school.

The Indians at last agreed to return the children to the school, if the principal would sign a paper that the children would be properly fed.

Miss Clarke signed a paper to this effect; and, on behalf of the Indians two of them signed a statement that they would give the school proper support.

Corpl. Clearwater and the Indian agent examined into the death of Hannah Maitland. Sworn statements were made by Miss Alton, field matron, and Miss Hortop, teacher. It was the opinion of

3.

Miss Alton that the child had died of spinal meningitis. It would appear from the evidence that they had given the child care and attention to the best of their knowledge, and ability. No physician is nearer than Prince Rupert, 125 miles away, by water.

We went through the whole school from the basement to the attic, and also inquired into the question of food given the children. The principal explained that it was often impossible to obtain fresh meat or fish; but the children always had sufficient food to eat, and three meals were served every day.

Before leaving the school we addressed the children, and asked them if they had any complaints to offer, as to food or treatment. As could be expected they remained silent. Indian children, in such circumstances, from diffidence, seldom or never speak, when questioned by white people.

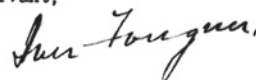
The school, upon inspection, appears cleanly and sanitary, and the children appear well clothed and fed.

An Indian, John Adams was convicted of having used insulting language to Miss Hortop, and sentenced to pay a fine of \$20.00 with the option of two months in jail; he paid the fine.

The Indians seemed to have taken a strong dislike to one of the teachers. Such feeling, however unreasonable or unmerited, is hard to remove from an Indian's mind. It is understood that at the end of the present year, this teacher's term of service will end, and she will then leave the school.

This report of a matter, delicate to handle, and difficult to set right, is most respectfully submitted, one copy being forwarded to Mr. R.C. Cairns, Inspector of Indian Schools for British Columbia.

Your obedient servant,



Indian Agent.

"E" Division.
Vancouver, B. C.

Coast Sub-District.
Ocean Falls Detachment.

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Confidential:

H. Ref. Nil.

Prv. Rept. Nil.

Coast S. D.

The Officer Commanding,
Coast Sub-District,
Royal Canadian Mounted Police,
Prince Rupert, B. C.

Ocean Falls, B. C.
June 13th, 1922.

RE: KITIMAT INDIAN RESERVE;
RE: Hanna GRANT; Deceased.

Sir:

I have the honour to report that acting upon information received I proceeded to Kitimat, B. C., accompanied by Indian Agent Iver Fougner, arriving there on Saturday June 3rd, 1922.

We found that all Indian Children had been withdrawn from the Elizabeth Long Memorial Home, a boarding school situated on the Kitimat Indian Reserve, by their parents as the result of the death of Hanna Grant, who died on May 8th 1922. We also found that a petition had been drawn up by the natives of the village, and signed by practically every one of them old enough to sign, demanding the dismissal of all teachers of the aforementioned boarding school, it being alleged in this petition that the Indian children inmates of the Home had been compelled to eat rotten fish and oat meal with worms in it. I did not take a copy of this petition, as I understand that Indian Agent Iver Fougner is forwarding the same to the Department of Indian Affairs at Ottawa.

On Monday June 5th, 1922, a meeting was held by the Indians in their Hall on the Kitimat Reserve at which the Indians invited Mr. Fougner and I to preside, table and chairs being arranged accordingly. Mr. Fougner, acting as chairman of the meeting took down (in writing) the minutes of the meeting in detail. I, acting as Mr. Fougner's assistant, entered notes of all important statements in my note-book, I beg to quote a summary of the same hereunder.

Meeting called to order by Indian Agent Iver Fougner at 10.45 A.M. Edward Grey, Indian, states:- "Last year I saw my child getting pale. I asked those at the Home if they had examined them (apparently he had two children in the Home at this time). They said no. I asked them again. Later she died in the Home. This year another child of mine, an older daughter became ill at the Home. She was pale and thin. I took her away and believe I saved her life by doing so. When Hanna Grant died this year, it was considered by the Indians that her death came as the result of neglect at the Home. Another reason which caused dissatisfaction among the Indians was the fact that Hanna Grant's Parents were not notified sooner."

Miss Alton, Field Matron, then stated that the parents were notified on Wednesday prior to the child's death on the following Monday.

At this stage of the meeting a letter was handed to the Indian Agent from the parents of Hanna Grant in which it was alleged that the child died as the result of chloroform administered by Miss Alton in order to put her to sleep. Miss Alton: "I have no chloroform in my possession, I never use it".

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Edward Grey continuing stated that the Ladies at the Home complained about Hanna Grant screaming during the night thereby disturbing their sleep during the last few nights she remained there, and that the said Ladies administered a Narcotic or sleeping draught in order to keep her quiet. He said the Indians called it chloroform because they knew no better. He would not say it was chloroform, but it was some drug which had a similar effect.

Mr. Willie Grant, father of the deceased child, stated that his daughter informed him the day he removed her from the School (Home) that she had not been receiving sufficient food. He also stated that he called at the Home one night about 11.00 O'clock and Miss Hortop told him that Miss Alton had given the child a powder to make her sleep, as she was getting tired of looking after her. She had not recovered from the effects of drugs when he removed her from the Home. Miss Alton: "I believe the child died of Spinal Meningitis with complications, and with that disease the patient usually goes into a coma or stupor during the last few days of their life."

Herbert McMillan, Indian, stated that Miss Alton admitted to Mrs Grant, the child's Mother, that she gave Hanna sleeping powders. In reply Miss Alton stated that she gave the child a powder to ease her pain, not to make her sleep.

Jacob Duncan, Indian, stated that after the death of Hanna Grant the parents of those children remaining at the Home held a meeting, and talked about the girls that had attended the Home. Since the Home started forty nine had died, and fifty were still alive, and the Indians did not understand why these deaths occurred. He did not know what caused the deaths. Duncan then went on to say that at the conclusion of their meeting those present sent word to the Council, who took the matter up and called some of the children from the home, and asked them how they were fed. The children stated that they were forced to eat rotten fish and oat meal with worms in it. Gertrude Grant, and all the big girls told this story. The Council decided that they themselves could not close the Home, so they called a meeting of all the people in the village, and all the parents of the children agreed to have their children removed from the Home, and keep them at their own homes, because of the ill treatment at the Home, in the way of not getting sufficient clothing and food, and they agreed to keep their children at their own homes until all Ladies, (Teachers, etc.) at the Home are discharged, and new appointments made.

Mr. Fougner then made a brief speech, informing the Indians that he did not think they could get better teachers, and that there were several other Indian Reserves in his Agency where such a school would be appreciated. Interruption by the Indians:- "They are welcome to it!" followed by great applause on the part of the Indians.

Herbert McMillan, Indian, then stated that the Indians did not wish to close the school, if the children were treated right. We only want people to treat our children right. We want our children educated, and we are always willing to help."

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Timothy Starr, Indian, stated that he was a pupil in a Boarding School at ? (near Port Simpson, I believe) and was far better treated there. No one ever went short of food.

David Grant, Indian, stated that the children required a better education. The boarding school at Kitimat had been the same for the past twenty years. The children were learning nothing.

Mr. Fougner then informed the Indians that they had no authority whatever to withdraw their children from the home, after having signed a contract for them to remain there.

In reply the Indians claimed that the contract with the school was to the effect that the children would be well cared for, provided with sufficient clothing, food, etc. One of the Indians stated that he had supplied all the clothing for his child. I asked Miss Clarke, head Teacher, who was present, if this was true. She replied that it might be, as if the Indians wished to supply clothing for their children the school did not duplicate, but that they were not compelled to supply clothing.

The Indians still seemed to be in a very hostile mood, so I decided to address them. My speech took up about half an hour's time. I outlined the situation, as best I knew how, explaining that we were not out to persecute the Indians, that I desired to see them get a fair deal at all times, but that they must abide by the law of the country the same as white people had to. They were certainly not authorized to take the law in their own hands, as they had done in this case, and furthermore if the matter went any farther it would have to be brought up in Court, which I felt sure was not desired by anyone present, besides if the matter had to go to Court, then practically all that they had told Mr. Fougner would be useless as most of it was hearsay. I emphasized the fact that if they went to Court they must state facts and nothing else. I informed them that they might be given up to six months with Hard Labour for the unlawful acts which they had committed, however, I sincerely hoped that there would be no necessity for imprisonment, especially at this time of the year when they had such great opportunities to make big money logging and fishing. I mentioned that there was no country in the world where Indians were treated better than they were under the British Flag. I also called their attention to the fact that the Canadian Government had become very poor owing to the great War, in which white people fought and gave their lives, while the Indians were allowed to live in peace, enjoying the privileges and protection of the British Flag. The Canadian Government had spent a large sum of money during the past few years endeavouring to educate the Indians, and help them to lead better lives in every way, but that there was a limit to what the Government could do for them. The Government could not give them something new in the way of schools etc., every day.

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I pointed out that there was nothing wrong about them making a complaint if they did so in the proper manner, in writing through their Indian Agent to the Department of Indian Affairs, but by taking the law in their own hands they had committed a serious offence, and they could consider themselves lucky that they were not all in gaol.

Referring then to the subject of food, I asked Miss Clark if she was willing to admit the parents of the children to the Home at meal times so that they might see for themselves just what their children were eating. She stated that she had no objections. I then questioned her regarding the amount of clothing allowed her, as to whether she was allowed sufficient to clothe the children properly. One of the principal complaints of the Indians had been in ~~connection~~ connection with the shoes supplied to the children at the Home. Miss Clark admitted that the shoes she had received during the past year were not the best, and that there had been a shortage of them, but stated that she had bought new rubbers for every girl in the school in order that they might keep their feet dry.

Then after advising the Indians that they had nothing to gain by keeping their children out of school, I asked for a vote to be taken among themselves as to what they intended to do. They agreed to send the children back to school provided that Miss Clark would sign her name to a paper before us that she would see that the children got all the food they wanted, that they would be well cared for, and be supplied with sufficient clothing. Miss Clark agreed to sign and did sign the required paper. I then gave instructions to the Indians that every child was to be returned to the school that day.

The meeting closed at two P.M.

Returning from Kitlobo on the 7th day of June 1922, I again called at Kitimat and found that all children in the village except that of Edward Grey had been returned to the Home. He had just arrived in from camp, and sent his child to the Home after I arrived there, on the understanding that he is to be allowed to take her with him to see Doctor Darby at Rivers Inlet when he goes fishing at that place. Miss Alton agreed to let the child go when the time comes as the glands in her throat should be removed. Miss Alton informed me that the other child which Grey complained about dying in the Home had the same complaint, (swollen glands) She did all she could for the child, which Grey admitted. He agreed to leave his child at the Home until his departure for Rivers Inlet. I might mention here that Grey is a very well educated Indian, and that he has some knowledge of Law.

I attach hereto the Sworn Statements of Miss Hortop and Miss Alton regarding the death of Hanna Grant.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
your obedient servant,

B. W. Cleaver Corpl. Reg. No. 8311.

In Charge of Ocean Falls Detachment.