

Case Study 3

Lejac Parents Protest, 1944-46

Documents in the Case

1. Extract from principal's report, 1944
2. Letter from William Irvine, Member of Parliament, Sept 14, 1945
3. Letter from Nautley Reserve Council, January 17, 1946
4. Extract from principal's report, March 31, 1946
5. Letter from Indian Agent Howe to Indian Commissioner for BC, Sept 12, 1946
6. Letter from Indian Agent Howe to Indian Commissioner for BC, Jan 24, 1947

Background

These are a selection of documents from the files of the Lejac Indian Residential School in the 1940s. Throughout that decade parents and community leaders in the Fraser Lake region repeatedly expressed their dissatisfaction with the school, and their desire for day schools in their communities.

During this time period Canadian society was undergoing considerable changes. World War Two (1939-1945) had broken down some of the old social barriers and issues, and in the years immediately following, there were moves to improve the lives of Canadians. Family allowance and Old Age Pensions were introduced (though not for status Indians). However, changes which were long overdue with the residential school system were very slow to happen.

As the people made their requests to have their children educated at home, a tragic incident was heavy in their memories. In 1937, four boys ran away from Lejac school on New Years Day, only to freeze to death on the lake before they could make it home.

Historical Notes

- The Truancy Section of the Indian, referred to in Document 5, was part of the 1920 amendment to the Indian Act, enforcing all First Nations children to go to day or residential school. This section said the government could make anyone a truant officer, allowing them to enforce attendance, and giving them the right to "enter any place where he has reason to believe there are Indian children" of school age and to arrest and convey them to school.
- During this time period, Indian Affairs was a branch of the Department of Mines and Resources.
- R. Howe was the Indian Agent for the Stuart Lake Agency, with headquarters in Vanderhoof.
- William Irvine was the Member of Parliament for Cariboo, belonging to the CCF party. He was a radical politician who fought for social justice issues, and was one of the founders of the CCF party, the forerunner to the NDP.
- In the fall of 1946, the Stony Creek Band offered the use of the recreation hall for use as a temporary school. By 1947 other day schools were being opened in the Stuart Lake Agency.

Digging Deeper

- The original documents in the case are found in the DIA School Files, microform c-8767. There are more letters of complaint about the school, and requests for day schools that can be looked up. Some of particular note are:
 - Letter from Chief Isadore, Oct 18, 1943, page 576
 - Letter from Chief Isadore, May 18, 1944, pages 567-568

- Principal's response to Chief Isadore, June 13, 1944, page 578
- Indian Agent's response to Chief Isadore's complaints, June 14, 1944, page 579
- Letter from Principal to Indian Agent in response to Irvine, October 17, 1945, page 603
- Indian Agent letter regarding request for day school, Oct 18, 1945, page 604
- Lawyer P. E. Wilson's letter to Indian Agent, Sept 9, 1946, page 614
- Indian Agent's response to Wilson, Sept 10, 1946, page 609

Discussion Questions

1. What were the reasons the First Nations communities gave for wanting day schools on their reserves? What were their grievances against Lejac Residential School?
2. What reasons did officials give for not implementing day schools?
3. What people did the First Nations communities in the Fraser Lake region contact to express their grievances?
4. Summarize the events of September 1946. What action did the parents take? What did the authorities do in response?
5. Comment on the feelings the parents must have had to cause them to take this action, and to have their children taken by the RCMP.
6. What do you think Indian Agent Howe meant when he said the parents were "defeating their own ends by their present attitude"? (Document 3-5) Was he correct in this statement?
7. How did the Stony Creek Band demonstrate the importance to them of providing a school for their children in their community?

163-1-1

Extract from Principal's Report regarding
the Lejac School. Original on Annual
Report of Principals of Indian Residential
Schools - 1944.

There is a movement of some of the neighbouring reserves to have day schools on their reserves, rather than send their children to this residential school. The leaders of this movement are individuals who are hostile to the school. While I have a certain amount of sympathy for the idea of day schools, I do not think it suitable for the Indians of Northern B.C. as yet. Our people are still nomadic to a great extent and spend a great part of their time away from their reserves. There is a great lack of discipline in our Indian families and the parents will not oblige their children to do anything they do not want to do. If a child does not want to attend school, the parents will not take any action to make them do so. In the Stuart Lake Agency alone I venture to say that two thirds of the children are not being educated. Many of the reserves there are small and remote, and difficult to access. But even in nearby reserves there are many children who never attend school. The capacity of this school is limited, and we have children here from four of the largest agencies in the Dominion, namely Stuart Lake, Babine, Stikine and Skeena, for which this is the only Residential School available. To remedy this situation I would suggest that either this school be enlarged or other schools built. Also I think that the provisions of the Indian Act obliging the attendance of the Indian children at some school be more rigourously enforced than they are at present. Many of our children are ten years of age or more when they are admitted and a large proportion of these only attend for two or three years, some even less. Consequently, they do not receive enough education and training to be of any real use to them.

Source: DIA School Files c-8767 p 571

DOCUMENT 3-2



House of Commons
Canada

SEP 17 1945

O t t a w a,
September 14, 1945

Mr. T.R.L. MacInnes,
Indian Affairs Branch,
Department of Mines and Resources,
O t t a w a

Dear Sir:

I met a delegation of Indian representatives at Vanderhoof. I desire to place before you the burden of their plea.

1 - They protest that T. B. spreads rapidly amongst the children who attend the local school. It is alleged that the children will be in dormitories, with no proper care taken to segregate those suffering from the disease and that, consequently, it spreads to healthy pupils. Instances were given by the delegation of children who entered the school healthy, having been thoroughly examined and X-rayed, but who came out a year or so later to return home and die.

2 - They protest that education is neglected to make the school farm pay, that the children would be better off working at home with their parents, if they have to do such work, rather than working for an institution. In this regard I quote the actual words of the delegation, - "The children learn only to pray and milk cows".

3 - The Indians in question strongly urge that they be permitted to establish public schools for Indian children on the same basis as that of schools for white children.

4 - They want some assistance in clearing more land. They want tractors, bulldozers, heavy equipment,

Source: DIA School Files c-8767 p 588

- 2 -

which is beyond the power of the Indian to obtain himself, but which he sorely needs in order to extend production.

5 - They also insist that the Old Age Pension be paid them on the same basis as it is paid to Canadian citizens generally. They claim that they receive now only \$4 a month and this amount is paid to them in kind as dictated by the Department.

So far as I was able to investigate there seemed to be good cause for the unrest among the Indians. I am, therefore, placing their plea before you in the hope that you will consider the matters herein mentioned and provide, if possible, remedial measures.

Yours sincerely,



W. Irvine,
Member for Cariboo

DOCUMENT 3-3

163-1-13 64-163

Nautley Reserve
Fort Fraser, B.C.
January 17th 1946.

xx xx xx

A meeting of the Fraser Lake Band of Indians at the Nautley Reserve, was held on January 5th 1946, and a motion was unanimously endorsed by all that a complaint was justified that when children were sick at the residential school at Lejac, they were not kept separate from the other children. Also the school children were not allowed inside when the weather was cold, and we believe the educational system at Lejac is not satisfactory. Therefore the Fraser Lake Band of Indians are submitting an earnest request for a day school to be built on this reserve so that we can have our children at home and at the same time see that they get the best education possible, and able to compete in life with the white race in their future life.

xx

xx Chief Maxime George
acting Head Man Alec George
Consul Seymour Thomas
Consul Donald George

JAN 31 1946
REGISTERED

Source: DIA School Files c-8770 p 400

~~D. J. Johnson~~
What do you wish
supplied?
H. J. Johnson

1- Records
J. H. Moore
Dr. Moore
Please see to
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DOCUMENT 3-5

LETTER OF THE
INDIAN AGENTPLEASE QUOTE
FILE E-2

163

Stuart Lake Agency,
Vanderhoof, B.C.,
September 12th, 1946.

AIR MAIL

Department of Mines & Resources, Indian Affairs Branch,
OTTAWA, Ontario.

I wish to advise that the Rev. A.R. Simpson, Principal of the Lejac Indian Residential School, reported 100 absentee pupils at the opening of the term, September 3rd last. Despite the efforts of the Agency Staff and the assistance of Cpl. Fielder of the local Detachment of the R.C.M.P., there are still approximately 70 truants.

The Indians list a number of grievances, such as the time spent by pupils in manual labour, and religious instruction, and also, their desire for Day Schools, as reasons for keeping the children at Home. The antagonism and opposition displayed by the Indians towards the Lejac Residential School is more marked in recent months than at any time since I took over the Agency 8 years ago.

I have patiently discussed the situation with the Chiefs and Headmen of the Bands concerned and advised them that in all probability in the not too distant future, changes will take place, particularly in relation to education and establishment of Day Schools where practicable, and that they are defeating their own ends by their present attitude.

The Stony Creek Band, where there are 40 absentees are particularly adamant, and positively refuse to return the children to school. They recently sent a representative to interview and obtain legal advice from Mr. P.E. Wilson, Barrister at Prince George, B.C. I am enclosing copies of correspondence between Mr. Wilson and myself in this regard. It is gratifying to note that Mr. Wilson gave sound advice and advised his clients to send the children to school.

In view of the determined attitude of the parents I feel that in order to ensure attendance at Lejac Residential School, action should be taken under the Truancy Section of the Indian Act. I have already served written notices on about 15 parents in accordance with Sec. 10, sub-sec. 3 of the Act, but before proceeding to issue summonses, I would like to have the Department's advice and approval.

I would strongly recommend that when the new School Inspector is appointed for B.C., that he meet the Chiefs and Headmen of this Agency to discuss and investigate their complaints at the first opportunity.

A reply by air-mail will be appreciated.

R. Howe
R. Howe,
Indian Agent.



RH/jf

cc: Major D.M. MacKay,
Indian Commissioner for B.C.

Source: DIA School Files c-8767 p 615

OFFICE OF THE
INDIAN AGENT



PLEASE QUOTE
FILE E-1-1

Stuart Lake Agency,
Vanderhoof, B.C.,
January 24th, 1947.

Major D.M. Mackay, Indian Commissioner for B.C.,
VANCOUVER, B.C.

Re: your file No. 215-13-5936.

I wish to refer to your letter dated December 3rd, 1946, with reference to the establishment of a Day School on the Stony Creek I.R. As requested, an estimate of the cost of materials and labour required to make the recreational hall suitable for School purposes is submitted hereunder:-

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Insulated brick siding for sheathing exterior walls - material only..... | 447.00 |
| 2. 30' brick chimney @ \$4.00 per foot including material and labour..... | 120.00 |
| 3. Heater and stove-pipes..... | 125.00 |
| TOTAL..... | 692.00 |

Labour sheathing the buildings will be done by the Band without cost to the Department. The Band have also acquired 5,000 B.M.F. Shiplap and about \$175.00 towards construction of a three room house for use of the teacher. Chief Antoine advises that construction of the house will proceed in the Spring. This project is being undertaken by the Indians of the Band without authority or advice from this Office. It is possible that the Department may have to provide some finishing material and furnishings for the quarters. In addition to the above, desks and other School equipment will be required. The Department will no doubt have data on hand with respect to cost of desks and School equipment.

There are at present 66 children of School age in the Stony Creek Band. 36 of this number are in attendance at the Lejac Indian Residential School, leaving 30 at home who are not receiving the benefit of an education. Referring to paragraph 4 of your letter, may I point out that in event of the establishment of a Day School on this Reserve, it would be very difficult indeed to enforce attendance at Lejac School for those who are now enrolled at Lejac. With the exception of a few orphans and under-privileged children, the parents would emphatically insist on the children attending the Day School.

There is no possibility of securing the services of a teacher in this district for the current term, but Mr. J. Wilson, a teacher at one of the local White Schools is interested, and his services may be available for the 1947-48 term, commencing September 1st next. Mr. Wilson is a Bachelor, age about 50 years and a Roman Catholic. He holds a B.C. Teacher's Certificate, and has taught School in the province for the past 20 years. In my opinion, he is a very suitable candidate for Indian School work. In this connection, will the Department please

Source: DIA School Files c-8729 p p 1318-1319

