

Blackfoot Children and Old Sun's Boarding School 1894-1897: A Case Study

Sheila Carr-Stewart, Ph.D.
University of Saskatchewan

Jane Preston
Ph.D. Candidate
University of Saskatchewan

Old Sun's Boarding School was established on the Siksika Nation in Southern Alberta by the Anglican Church, and operated with the jurisdiction of the federal government. The purpose of this research is to utilize archival information obtained from both the 1894 to 1897 *Monthly Returns* for Old Sun's Boarding School and the Department of Indian Affairs' *Annual Reports* for the same time frame to document the effects Canada's educational assimilation policy had upon the Blackfoot people of the Siksika Nation. This study supports other research findings related to residential schools (Knockwood, 1992; Miller, 1997; Milloy, 1999) and research by Chansonneuve (2005), which focused on residential school trauma. This study also deepens our understanding of Canada's residential school policy and administrative practices.

The traditional lands of the Blackfoot peoples spanned an area encompassing present-day southern Alberta, south-western Saskatchewan, and from the North Saskatchewan River to the upper Missouri River (Bear Robe, 1991; Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, 2005b). Situated in the heart of these lands, Blackfoot Crossing was a gathering place and spiritual centre for the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy, which consisted of the Siksika, Kainai, and Pi'kanii, and who from time to time were joined there by the T'suu Tina, and Stoney Nations (Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park, 2005a). Blackfoot Crossing was the chosen site for the meeting between representatives of the five First Nations and the British Crown: together, they negotiated and agreed to Treaty 7.

On September 22, 1877, in solemn celebration of the signing of Treaty 7, Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Treaty Commissioners and representatives of the five First Nations shared the pipe in sacred ceremony. The Treaty Com-

missioners were accompanied by a detachment of the North-West Mounted Police who fired “their field guns in honor of the successful conclusion of the negotiations” (Morris, 1880/1991, p. 259). In exchange for sharing their lands with the ever-increasing number of Euro-Canadians moving into Blackfoot Confederacy territory, Her Majesty’s Treaty Commissioners assured First Nations of the “allowance they [were] to count upon and receive from Her Majesty’s bounty and benevolence” (Morris, 1880/1991, p. 368). Realities of the Queen’s *benevolence* included First Nations occupancy of designated reserve lands, an annual \$5 to \$25 treaty payment per First Nations person, and the provision of services to the Treaty 7 people in exchange for sharing their land with the newcomers. These services were essential to the very survival of the Blackfoot who faced the loss of their staple food source—the buffalo (due to unscrupulous hunting of fur traders and ‘sport’ shooters) and who also needed to learn skills in order to participate in the new economy of the prairie provinces as newcomers moved into and settled the land.

The purpose of this paper is to utilize archival information obtained from both the 1894 to 1897 *Monthly Returns* for Old Sun’s Boarding School—retrieved from the Blackfoot Agency File (BAF) at the Glenbow Museum, Calgary—and the Department of Indian Affairs’ *Annual Reports* for the same time period to document the effects of Canada’s educational assimilation policy had upon the Blackfoot people of the Siksika Nation. The original school documents entitled *Monthly Returns* located in Blackfoot Agency File spanned only a three-year period. While the file predominantly dealt with the management of the Siksika reserve, the school documents provided detailed information relating to the students and the operation of the school. The *Monthly Returns* related to **student enrolment, attendance, and information** pertaining to students’ parents, band affiliation, band numbers, health status, educational attainment levels, and also referenced the language, culture, and activities of the Siksika community. The educational assimilative protocols and practices at Old Sun’s Boarding School resulted in the removal of children from their parents’ homes, limited academic opportunities within the school; as well, they played a part in the significant student mortality rates. We portray the parents’ steadfast determination to regain authority over their children’s lives, the children’s predominately futile efforts to maintain ties with their parents, and the desire of both parents and children to preserve their cultural identity. The national educational policies and prac-

tices of Old Sun's Boarding School's administration are lingering historical issues, a legacy that "disconnect[ed] . . . children . . . from their families and communities and sever [ed] all ties with languages, customs and beliefs" (Chansonneuve, 2005, p. 5).

THE NUMBERED TREATIES

Treaty 7 was one of a series of treaties often referred to as the numbered or post-confederation treaties, which were signed by the Crown and Canada's First Nations peoples between 1871 and 1921. Although each treaty was "unique in its terms and scope of application" (Macklem, 2001, p. 152), the provision of educational services (agreed upon both orally and in written form) was an integral component of each of the numbered treaties. In particular, for Treaty 7, the Crown's educational obligation to the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy included the provision of educational services as requested by the First Nations peoples. The quality of this education was to be "equal to the whites" and enable First Nations peoples to participate in the "new economy" in western Canada "when the buffalo are no more" (Morris, 1880/1991, pp. 237–268). Although through Treaty 7 First Nations peoples were to receive a European-style of education, the Crown's educational provisions were not meant to deter First Nations peoples from also accessing and promoting their own Indigenous education. Elder Norman Sunchild (as cited in Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000) explained that acquiring an Indigenous education was a lifetime journey integrated within realms of traditions and spirituality:

[Tribal members] spent their lifetime studying, meditating, and living the way of life required to understand . . . traditions, teachings, and laws. . . In their study, they rooted their physical and spiritual beings directly on Mother Earth as a way of establishing a connectedness to the Creator and His Creation. Through that connectedness, they received the conceptual knowledge they required and the capacity to verbalize and describe the many blessings bestowed on them by the Creator. (p. 1)

The Crown and First Nations peoples, as espoused in Treaty 7, mutually recognized that both Indigenous and Western education were essential for the survival and well-being of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Alexander Morris, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories from 1872-19877, acknowledged the importance of the Crown staying true to treaty

promises when he wrote to Prime Minister John MacDonald, "I regard it as of vital importance that the existing Treaties should be carried out to the letter" (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, 1876, Box 2/4.94). Yet the federal government paid little heed to Morris' advice. When Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney visited Blackfoot Crossing two years after the signing of Treaty 7, he noted, "About 1,300 [of the people were] in a very destitute condition and many on the verge of starvation" (as cited in Jobson, 1985, p. 13). Dewdney, concerned with the cost of providing food to the Blackfoot, urged them to follow the buffalo trail to Montana. Finding little to eat, Crowfoot led his people back to Blackfoot Crossing. During the two year trek, one thousand Blackfoot died (Jobson, 1985).

DAY SCHOOLS TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS: POLICY, PURPOSE, AND INTENT

Abdicating its constitutional and treaty obligations, Canada bestowed its responsibilities to establish schools for First Nations peoples to missionary groups (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Following the signing of Treaty 7, missionaries and First Nations people constructed day schools on the individual Blackfoot Confederacy reserves. Mike Mountain Horse of the Kanai First Nations attended one of these day schools and stated, "After we settled on reserves, these missionaries visited our Indian camps periodically to enrol pupils for the day schools opened by some of the churches" (Mountain Horse, 1979, pp. 14-15). Day schools, built in the midst of First Nations communities, often required the children to walk long distances to attend school but nevertheless enabled students to attend school within their own community and to live within the security of their parents' home.

Shortly after day schools were established in accordance with the articles of Treaty 7, day school policy was subjugated by the *Davin Report* of 1879. The *Davin Report* espoused that the American Indian residential school protocol of removing children from their communities be emulated in Canada in order to aggressively assimilate First Nations children into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture (Barman, Hérbert, & McCaskill, 1986; Miller, 1997). Missionary and other charitable organizations became entwined in implementing the federal government's educational policy of "substitut[ing] boarding schools for day schools on reserves" and ensured "educational influences . . . [were] . . . brought to bear upon the young" (Department of

Indian Affairs [DIA], 1891, p. xxix). Residential schools isolated First Nations children from their communities and severed children from parental influence and Elder knowledge (Knockwood, 1992). As explained by Miller (1997), residential schools were “the vehicle of the newcomers’ attempts to refashion and culturally eliminate the first inhabitants’ way of life and identity” (p. 10). Milloy (1999) described residential schools as a policy of assimilation, designed to transform First Nations communities. Similarly, Chansonneuve (2005) argued:

The purpose of residential schooling was to assimilate Aboriginal children into mainstream Canadian society by disconnecting them from their families and communities and severing all ties with languages, customs and beliefs. To this end, children in residential schools were taught shame and rejection for everything about their heritage, including their ancestors, their families and, especially, their spiritual traditions. (p. 5)

Milloy (1999) considered Canada’s residential school policy a national crime.

Not only did residential schools deny First Nations peoples access to their cultural roots, residential school policy dehumanized First Nations peoples by treating them as a human commodity needed to fuel a new economy:

The system of absorption of Indian children by boarding and industrial training schools should be widely extended [and] the rule...should be unremitting [The] policy if systematically pursued would doubtless be most economical in the end, as the Indian children trained at such institutions would acquire practical knowledge, which would fit them for becoming useful members of society. (DIA, 1891, p. xiii)

School instructors trained students for careers as domestic workers, gardeners, and farmhands, which led to tedious, low-paying jobs that perpetuated social inequality between the First Nations peoples and the surrounding Euro-Canadian society (Carter, 1999). Having First Nations students working in such menial capacities was an “extension of the power of the Canadian state, and the maintenance of sharp social, economic and spatial distinctions between the dominant and subordinate population” (Carter, 1999, p. 103). The DIA *Annual Report* (1891) reinforced Canada’s intent to educate and train First Nations students for menial positions:

It would be highly desirable, if it were practicable to obtain entire possession of all Indian children after they attain to the age of seven or eight years, and keep them at schools of the industrial type until they have had a thorough course of instruction, not only in the ordinary subjects taught at public schools, but in some useful and profitable trade, or in agriculture, as the aptitude of the pupil might indicate he was best fitted for. (p. xii)

In summary, First Nations peoples were trained to be able to secure employment within the lower socioeconomic fringes of Canadian society. Their level of participation in the new economy was controlled by the Crown's willingness to provide educational services.

BEGINNING CHURCH-STATE SCHOOLING AT SIKSIKA FIRST NATION

Espoused by the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Canada's Indian policy allowed "any religious denomination that be carrying on mission work upon a Reserve a reasonable quantity of land for buildings" including schools and teacherages (Edgar Dewdney Papers, M320, Vol. V.) Within this context, in 1883, Reverend John W. Tims was instructed by the Church Missionary Society to proceed to Blackfoot Crossing and build a log building, 29 feet by 24 feet, with a shingled roof and wooden floor (Stocken, 1976/1987, p. v). Under these instructions, Tims arrived at the Siksika community and was appalled to find the First Nations peoples beset by famine and decimated by disease. Soon after, Tims wrote to the Church Missionary Society requesting a doctor to be sent to the reserves because, as he stated, "Blackfeet [sic] are dying around us now that winter has just set in" (as cited in Stocken, 1976/1987, p. viii). The 1892 *Annual Report* reinforced such conditions were not isolated to the Siksika community. Within the District of Alberta¹, the total Indigenous population was "diminished by 537 souls during the past year: which was largely by the result of the 'la grippe' or the after effects of that disease" (DIA, 1982, p. xix).

As part of his missionary duties, Tims initially established a day school, but when Canada implemented its residential school policy, the day school at the North Camp area of Siksika was closed and was replaced by the Anglican-Church-run Old Sun's Boarding School. Similarly, the Roman Catholic day school located at the South Camp area of Siksika was closed and replaced with a residential school. There is little indication that the tenets

of either denominations were of particular importance to parents. Parents sought education rather than religious training for their children and, as indicated in the *Monthly Returns*, parents moved their children between the two denominational schools:

Nos. 31 & 47 were transferred to the [Roman Catholic] Boarding School [at] South Camp on September 1st (BAF, 1894, September).

No. 30 has . . . transferred to the south Boarding School (BAF, 1895, December).

The Department of Indian Affairs (1891) described boarding schools as “neat, clean, well-aired, well-appointed – though inexpensive – building,” and considered these buildings a vast improvement over “the crowded, dingy, and too often dirty huts,” which served as day schools (p. 66). The Department of Indian Affairs’ (1894) description of Old Sun’s Boarding School reflected its euphoria for the new policy, as the school was described as a handsome building comprised of :

One room is 30 x 20, sixteen feet ceiling, six windows. A second room is 20 x 15, four windows, a sliding door between the two, so that all can be thrown into one when desired. The porch entrance has one window. There is an open chimney, and the school is heated by a furnace. There is a belfry and bell. (p. 177)

Anglican Bishop Pinkham officially opened the new boarding school, which “accommodated twenty-five to thirty children,” all of whom were to be “under the control of the Rev. Mr. Tims” (DIA, 1892, p. 182). From 1894–1897, Magnus Begg resided on Siksika Reserve and was recognized through the *Indian Act, 1876* with the title of Indian Agent whose all-encompassing power stemmed from the Indian Act. In a letter dated August 21, 1893, Indian Agent Begg wrote to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs stating, “The boarding school at North Reserve . . . now contains ten girls and thirty boys” (DIA, 1892, p. 182). The federal government, however, only funded the school to \$72 per student per annum, to a maximum of 30 students (DIA, 1894, p. 265). During the three-year time frame covered within this research, the *Monthly Returns* indicated that the number of students often exceeded 30; however, rations were only received on a sporadic basis for the extra students. In June 1895, rations were received for four extra students. In September 1895, December 1895, and September 1896, rations were provided for one extra student during each of these three years. Tims indicated that despite

student funding and the limited additional rations, he had “great difficulty in keeping the school going” (DIA, 1894, December).

By 1894, Indian Agent Begg recorded, “Rev. Mr. Tims, of the Church of England Mission, has the St. John’s Boarding School² in good running order, and is building additions to it, as he has all the children he can accommodate at present” (DIA, 1894, p. 90). From time to time, the Department of Indian Affairs conducted inspections of residential schools located on reserves. The *Inspection Report* for Old Sun’s Boarding School was incorporated into the 1894 *Annual Report*:

The Saint John’s House was inspected on 2nd April 1894. Rev. Mr. Tims is principal; HF Baker, teacher of senior classes, and WG White, master and teacher of junior classes.

Number of pupils present twenty-three. There were thirty-two boarders, but some were laid up with measles. (p. 177)

The 1894 *Annual Report* identified that 76 school-aged children resided on the Siksika Reserve, 65 of whom were enrolled in the two boarding schools associated with the reserve (p. 177).

SCHOOL ACADEMIC STANDARDS

As outlined by the Department of Indian Affairs, all First Nations boarding schools adopted course standards based on the Ontario syllabus, textbooks, and resource materials (DIA, 1891, p. 66). The Department recognized, however, that teachers received little guidance in implementing the syllabus. “There are marked indications that class time-tables suited to the course of study should be brought into use” (p. 66). Frequently, when the teacher was ill, no classes were held; the children were then employed in industrial-type work around the school and homes (Blackfoot Agency File [BAF], 1896, June).

All academic materials and supplies located in each school were noted as government property. The December 1894 *Monthly Return* accounted for the following on-hand supplies: 1 blackboard and 18 desks (of which one was identified as “worn out”). The March 1897 *Monthly Return* identified that School Material and Government Property was: 12 Standard 1 books, 20 Standard 2 books and 15 Standard 3 books, including 6 arithmetic, 2 geography and 4 grammar books. There was no indication that textbooks for Standard 4 to 6 were available at Old Sun’s Boarding School. It was recorded

under a *remarks* column that the school had one copy of both *Our Canadian Prairie* and *Prairie Agriculture*, accompanied with one map each of Canada, Quebec, Ontario, British Isles, Eastern Hemisphere, Western Hemisphere, Europe, and the North-West Territories. As well, there were picture and numeral cards. The school's inventory also consisted of ½ box of crayons, 20 copy books, 1 ink pellet, 12 pen holders, 25 slates, 1¼ slate pencils and 12 lesson cards. Since the average attendance during the three years was 37 students per month, the above supplies would have been shared among those students.

The 1892 *Annual Report* stated that new boarding school on the Siksika reserve was educating a "rising generation," (DIA, 1982, p. xii); however, the *Monthly Returns* detailed the students' academic achievement, or lack thereof, and provided a bleak account of the instruction and curriculum offered in the school. The grade structure was identified as Standard 1 to 6. The students' status in the classes were marked as *Very Good*, *Good*, *Fair*, or *Bad*. Unless a student had previously been enrolled at an on-reserve day school, upon entrance into Old Sun's Boarding School, he/she was automatically placed in Standard 1. Advancement from one standard to the next was rare. During 1894 to 1897, of the 60 students registered, only eight students moved from Standard 1 to Standard 2. No student was recorded as having achieved beyond Standard 3. With that said, comments of the students' academic progress were noted on the appropriate *Monthly Returns*:

The children are all doing well at their studies and have the advantage of a Teacher and asst. (BAF, 1894, December).

The pupils are all making steady progress back in class and in general behaviour (BAF, 1895, March).

As indicated by the *Monthly Returns*, the aim of schooling was not academic advancement or educational opportunities, but "industrial employment" (BAF, 1895, March). The students received training as carpenters, teamsters, fatigue duty personnel, and domestic workers. In June 1896, it was noted the children "were employed at Industrial work in and around the Home" (BAF, June 1896). In December of the same year, the *Monthly Return* recorded the children were working on various construction projects on the reserve. Besides such physical work, children were also responsible for the washing and mending of their clothes. The principal's comments on the *Monthly Returns* highlighted the specific work and study activities of the children:

Nos. 1, 2, 44 . . . getting handy with tools. Nos. 3 & 20 have also had considerable outside work (BAF, 1894, September).

Nos. 1 & 2 are assisting in the [construction] of the Hospital" (BAF, 1894, December).

Some of the pupils have had a good bit of practice at making brooms and brushes out of birch sticks (BAF, 1895, March).

Beyond regular chores about the institution there has been little chance for industrial employment this quarter, but some of the pupils have had a good bit of practice at making brooms and brushes out of birch sticks (BAF, 1895, March).

The children now in the home are too young for any Industrial training beyond doing chores; except Nos. 18 [18 years] & 20 [14years]. They are engaged in teaming and carpentering" (BAF, 1895, December).

Children were employed at Industrial work in and around the Home" (BAF, 1896, June).

Children make very fair progress in conversational English and are applying themselves in other ways to our satisfaction (BAF, 1896, September).

The progress of the children in school and in their outdoor and 'Home' duties has been satisfactory (BAF, 1896, December).

The progress of the children is noticeable in educational knowledge. The boys do their own washing and mending creditably (BAF 1896, December).

Although some of the above comments pertained to the students' academic achievements, for the most part, observations were a description of the students' domestic and industrial skills.

THE INDIAN AGENT

Section 137 of the *Indian Act, 1894* stated that the Indian Agent had full authority invested in him by the federal Department of Indian Affairs to control all aspects of reserve life, including enforcing school attendance. Along with the police, the Indian Agent had the "force of law" to enter the home and remove children "to secure compulsory attendance of children at school." Parents who were reluctant to have their children removed from home to attend residential school faced "punishment, upon summary conviction, by fine or imprisonment, or both" (*Indian Act, 1894, Section 137[2]*). Thus Indian

Agent Begg had the legal authority (with or without physical force) to command all school-aged children attend the boarding school. Once in attendance, children were required to reside at the school for the school year, and they were rarely granted permission to visit their parents during the year. Parents' approved visits to see their children were infrequent occasions.

Indian Agent Begg signed the school's *Monthly Returns* and, in so doing, acknowledged he had "carefully examined the within Return and hereby certify that it is correctly made out in accordance with the instructions of the Department" (BAF, 1894, July). Begg's control of the Old Sun's Boarding School was reflected in principal's comments documented on the *Monthly Returns*:

No. 12 was forcibly taken away by her parents and returned on instructions of Agent. By way of punishment she is not allowed to go out for a month's holiday as granted to some of the children (BAF, 1894, June).

Nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 16, 32, 33, 48, 26, 30, 47 were absent during July brought back by the [Indian] agent (BAF, 1894, September).

Nos. 1, 3, 6, 22, 36, 44, 48, 50, 55, 56, 012, 015, 016, 026, 041, & 057 were allowed out on orders Agent for short periods (BAF, 1895, June).

Fortnight holiday was given [to the students] with the [Indian] agent's permission in July (BAF, 1896, September).

#50 was out of sorts for 3 days [and] was allowed by [Indian] agent to go home (BAF, 1896, December).

#65 [Tom Wolf Tail aged 6] on the ground of homesickness was granted permission by Agent to sleep at home on the nights of 24, 29, 30 (BAF, 1896, December).

Such comments were evidence of the powers invested in the Indian Agent; he often used force to ensure student attendance at Old Sun's Boarding School.

STUDENT IDENTITY

The *Monthly Returns* for Old Sun's Boarding School recorded personal information pertaining to each student. Between June 1894 and July 1897, 60 children (39 boys and 21 girls) attended the school. The ages of the students ranged from 4-year-old Mary Appikokia (registered from June 1894 until her death in 1897), to John Aussiusan and David Red Old Man who,

during the final term of September 1896, were 18 years old. An orphaned baby boy, Archie Bear's Direction, identified as less than one year of age, was also included on the *Monthly Return* with the comment that he was "too young to receive instruction" (BAF, 1895, June). The average age of the students attending the school ranged from 10 years and 3 months in June 1894 to 11.0 years in June 1896. Once enrolled, students predominantly attended the school until they reached the age of 18. After the age of 18, students generally transferred to the Calgary Industrial School³, married, or left for specific reasons that were usually health-related.

On the *Monthly Return*, the students were identified by numbers according to their initial enrolment date. Thus, John Harrington and Willie Mayfield, listed as numbers 1 and 2, attended the school from the date of the school's official opening in 1886, while Sarah Wolf Ear was enrolled in June 1897 and was represented as number 69. During the initial years of the school's existence, all of the children were identified by an Anglicized first and last name, although their parents' Indigenous names were listed on the *Admission List* (an addendum to the *Monthly Return*). However, during the years 1894 to 1897, as identified on the *Monthly Returns*, the practice of giving the students an Anglicized surname upon entry was changed, and a number of pre-enrolled children had their surnames altered. For example, John Harrington was later referred to as John Aussiusan, and Harry England's name changed to Harry Reddish Gun. Similarly, Gertie Stains' name was later recorded as Gertie Red Old Man. In March 1897, George, Mark, and Bertie Cutter's surname was changed to Weazle Robe, while 7-year-old Herbert's surname was changed from Ridge under Water to Little Face. The *Monthly Return* for March 1897 stated, "Pupils surnames have been altered in accordance with Circular No 112⁴ dated February 2, 1897 and Mr. Bakers' letter dated [18]97" (BAF, 1897, March). Thus, irrespective of the right of parents to name their own children, parental responsibility was demeaned.

Although student's names were listed on the *Monthly Returns*, in written remarks within *Monthly Returns*, the principal always referred to students by their numbered placement on the school enrolment list: "No. 25 went out on sick leave . . . Nos. 48 & 47 were allowed out June 1st for 8 weeks holidays" (BAF, 1894, March). The renaming of the children when they entered the residential school, the bureaucratic edict changing students' names, and the reference to children by a number not only suggested the lack of rela-

tionships formed with the children, but emphasized the isolation of children from their family environment.

STUDENT HEALTH RECORDS

Dr. Lindsay, who resided in Calgary, made frequent visits to the Siksika and surrounding area to conduct health examinations of children prior to their admittance as pupils into the boarding schools. Following the medical examinations, he issued certificates related to the status of the children's health. In reference to his medical examinations of the children, on February 13, 1895, he wrote:

13 students classified as healthy – 10 to attend the Roman Catholic Boarding School and 3 Old Sun's School (BAF, 1895, February).

Dr. Lindsay also noted that 4 students were "suffering from slight attacks of scrofula but amenable to treatment" (BAF, February, 1895). During his subsequent visit on February 19, 1895, Dr. Lindsay examined three students and found them all healthy and fit to attend Old Sun's Boarding School (BAF, 1895, February).

The school inspectors, hired by the Department of Indian Affairs, frequently noted the poor health of students in residential schools. The 1894 *Annual Report* provided the *Inspectors Report* for Old Sun's Boarding School. The Inspector noted, "Owing to the prevalence of measles, the children were not so bright and quick in their work as on former occasions" (DIA, 1894, p. 177). Similarly, in completing the *Monthly Return*, the principal frequently referenced the health status of the children at Old Sun's Boarding School:

No. 25 was out sick last quarter and has not yet returned (BAF, 1894, September).

No. 42 was discharged on account [of] scrofula [on] 12 August 93 was readmitted 18 Sept 94, as he appeared to have regained health (BAF, 1894, September).

The health of the children has been fair (BAF, 1895, December).

No. 51 left School on 20 January by Doctor's advice being unfit to associate with other children (BAF, 1896, March).

No. 32 was ill for nearly 2 months but was nursed by oneself in the Home and has quite recovered (BAF, 1896, March).

No. 50 was allowed out by Agent owing to loss of sight in one eye on 26 April for a few days and returned in a fortnight (BAF, 1896, June).

While a good deal of sickness has visited the different villages our Home has been free (BAF, 1896, December).

Pupils Nos. 41 & 56 have not yet returned to school. They are medically unfit. As soon as the Dr. certifies to their wellness they will return (BAF, 1897, March).

During the three-year time span covered by this research, 11 students were recorded as having died while registered at the school, including 10-month old Archie Bear's Direction. Many of the seriously ill children were sent home during the final stages of their sickness. A few days after being sent home, they were documented on the *Monthly Return* as having died at home or in the village (BAF, 1895, June). A form titled *Corrected [School Register] List* (also located in the Blackfoot Agency File) was a 1908 summary of the whereabouts of students who attended Old Sun's Boarding School prior to 1908. The *Corrected List* recorded the deaths of an additional 11 students who had been enrolled at Old Sun's Boarding School during June 1894 to June 1897 but died between 1897 and 1908. In all, between 1894 and 1897, 22 of the 60 students enrolled at Old Sun's Boarding School were deceased by 1908.

Data on the *Monthly Return* and the *Corrected [School Register] List* recorded the name and usually the cause of death for each child, as illustrated below:

James Crow Chief, aged eleven years died of consumption on November 18, 1894 (BAF, 1894, November).

Roy Peacemaker, age 6 who had been in the school for 3 months died April 26, 1895 from inflammation of the lungs (BAF, 1895, June).

Mable Petankaatsis, age 13 years, died on May 2, 1895 (BAF, 1895, June).

Mike Calf Robe, age 7 died of Scrofula, 1895 (BAF, 1895, June).

Archie Bear's Direction, an orphan, recorded as ten months old at time of death in 1895 (BAF, 1895, June).

Frank Red Old Man, age 11, died 1896 from Scrofula (BAF, 1895, June).

Gertie Red Old Man who spent 4½ years at the school, died suddenly on February 13, 1896, after a short illness (BAF, 1896, March).

John Aussinsain who spent five years at the school died in an accident April 16, 1896 at 18 years of age (BAF, 1896, June).

Alfred Red Bull, age 12, who had spent 4 years at the school died May 18, 1896 (BAF, 1896, June).

Louie Bear's Direction who spent five years at the school died suddenly. Had scrofula badly for many years on July 21, 1896 (BAF, 1896, June).

Mary Appikokia, age 6 died in 1897 [of] TB (BAF, 1897).

The morality rates for sickness and disease, combined with morbidity from accidents, demonstrate the high-risk nature of life in the residential school.

PARENT AND STUDENT VOICES

As mentioned previously, not all parents willingly yielded their children to the Indian Agent's control. The *Annual Report* for 1894 recorded the parents' determination to maintain ties with their children. "In the past no small amount of difficulty has been experienced in getting Indian parents to consent to leave their children in these institutions for terms sufficiently long to enable them to receive permanent benefit" (DIA, 1894, p. xxi). The written remarks of both Tims and Stocken⁵ on the *Monthly Returns* described the parents' attempts to maintain contact with their children, to support their children, and how they attempted to defy the Indian Agent:

No. 12 was forcibly taken away by her parents to attend a Tobacco Dance on May 11th and was absent 2 days and returned on instructions of [Indian] Agent (BAF, 1894, June).

Big Road assisted us in nursing the lad through a long and dangerous illness in which at times his life was despaired of by Dr. Lindsay and everyone else. The lad is now running about better in health than ever he was (BAF, 1896, March).

Nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 22, 42, 56 also Nos. 41, 25, & 59 allowed out by direction of Agent last summer for Sun Dance have not yet been returned (BAF, 1896, March).

No. 62 was taken out by the father on the ground of sickness without permission was out 2 nights (BAF, 1896, December).

The 1894 to 1897 *Monthly Returns* from the Old Sun's Boarding School tell us much about the struggle of Blackfoot parents in maintaining contact with their children and about the assimilation policies and actions of the federal government. On the *Discharge of Pupils List*, dated April 4, 1894, it was noted that two days after "measles appeared on [eleven year old Tommy] . . . his father took him out of bed [at Old Sun's] by force." The June 1894 *Monthly Return* recorded Marion Dog Chief, age 13, was also "forcibly taken by par-

ents to attend a tobacco dance on May 11." Two years later, the March 1896 *Monthly Return* recorded that Marion Dog Chief "was married on 24 Feb. without permission . . . [she] seemed bound to yield to her parents' wishes." Principal Stocken noted that the actions of Marion were "a disappointment to ourselves as arrangements were being made for her special training under a lady in Toronto" (BAF, 1896, March). This decision illustrated the ultimate authority of the Indian Agent. More than likely, the Indian Agent's intention to send Marion to Toronto would not have included the permission of Marion parents or the wishes of Marion, herself.

Marion Dog Chief and her family's defiance of the Indian Agent and the school was not an isolated incident. Siksika children, from time to time, demonstrated they did not willingly accept the lifestyle that was forced upon them at residential school. Through such incidents as running away from Old Sun's Boarding School, they showed their aversion to be detained at the residential school. Specific related incidents were indicated in the *Monthly Returns* during June 1894 to March 1896.

Nos. 1, 2, 5, were allowed out June 1st for 8 weeks. Nos. 1, 2, 5 wished to leave the School thinking they were too big [ages 16, 15, and 16 respectively]. Nos. 1 & 2 have promised to return.

No. 12 was married on 24th Feb. without permission. She was in every way a credit to the Institution but seemed bound to yield to her parent's wishes.

No. 25 has not yet returned to school (March 1895) and in June 1895 No. 25 is still absent.

Nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 16, 32, 22, 48, 26, 38, & 47 were absent during July on leave. Some remained out during 1st week in August without leave and were brought back by efforts of the Agent.

[Seventeen students] allowed out on orders of Agent only [one student number] 26 returned on time.

Such comments showed that the children seemed eager to vacate Old Sun's Boarding School and appeared reluctant to return to the institution as evidenced in the *Monthly Returns*, similarly parents were reticent to send them back to boarding school as evidenced in the lateness of the children returning to the school.

RESISTANCE TO ASSIMILATION

Personal information relating to each student at the time of his/her enrolment at Old Sun's Boarding School was recorded on the *Admission of Pupils List* including data under the heading *Religion of Parents*. With the exception of two parents, all parents were described as heathens or pagans. Adam Dog Chief's parents were shown as members of the Church of England; Ada Keg's parents were listed as pagans who were under the instruction of the Church of England. Despite the resolute focus of Canada's Indian policy to eliminate the spirituality and customs of the Blackfoot (and other First Nation people across Canada), the Blackfoot and their children were steadfast in their beliefs and traditional practices. This point was evidenced in the June 1894 *Monthly Return*. "Nos. 19 & 20 ran away on May 11th to the Tobacco Dance, but returned when it was over." As evidenced in the actions of some students and parents Siksika Nation members desired to maintain their own culture, beliefs, practices, and spirituality and did not willingly accede to the forced assimilation demands of the federal government's policy, procedures, and legislation. Through amendments to the *Indian Act* in the 1880s as well as through policy and procedures dictates, the federal government attempted to annihilate Blackfoot ceremonies (Carter, 1999) by banning the Sun Dance and other spiritual and cultural activities and noted in the 1892 *Annual Report*, "The sun-dance held last season...is believed to be the last celebration of that ceremony" (DIA, 1892, p. xix). Inevitably, the Blackfoot culture and spirituality was affected due to the power of the government legislation as evidenced in through the Sun Dance. The latter a four-to-eight day religious ceremony (Mountain Horse, 1979).

As an adult writing from a child's perspective, Aboriginal storyteller and poet, George Kenny (1977), described the security embedded within a First Nations' home:

Fire in the center, smoke rising, and the interior [tipi] decorated with children's laughter, grandmother's soft comfort, and even mother's periodic scolding instruction, and best of all, huddling together in winter. (p. 74)

In contrast, separated and isolated from family, Canada's assimilation practices took an enormous toll, emotionally and physically, on the children attending the residential schools across Canada. As evidenced through Old Sun's Boarding School limited educational opportunities, a significant stu-

dent death rate, and the isolation of children from the nurturance and support of their parents, extended family, and community, was typical of the residential school era. Siksika students often demonstrated their defiance of the residential educational system by running away from boarding schools in an attempt to be reunited with their parents. Despite a multitude of formidable difficulties, including Canadian legislation, the threat of legal action, and the all-encompassing authority of the Indian Agents, many Siksika parents strove to maintain contact with their children and attempted to ensure their children remained practiced in Indigenous customs, traditions, and spirituality.

NOTES

- 1 In 1881, the Canada's Department of the Interior divided western prairie territories into the four districts of: Alberta, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, and Athabasca (United Western Communications Ltd., 1992).
- 2 The names St. John's Boarding School and St. John's House were used interchangeably with the name Old Sun's Boarding School (Glenbow Museum, 2010).
- 3 Industrial schools were established in Western Canada during the early 1880s. Carter (1999) described industrial schools as governmental programs of assimilation. "Students spent half of the day on academic pursuits, and the other half on learning skills and trades. Boys learned carpentry, farming, and blacksmithing and, later on, shoemaking. Girls learned such household skills as laundry, cooking, and sewing" (p. 165).
- 4 Circular No 112 was a national edict from Indian Affairs, which allowed for name changes.
- 5 In 1885, Stocken arrived at the Siksika Reserve to serve as a lay assistant to Tims (Archive Photograph Search Results, 1901; Stocken, 1976/1987).

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Sheila Carr-Stewart is Professor and Department Head, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Sheila can be reached at Sheila.Carr-Stewart@usask.ca.

Jane Preston (B. Ed., M.Ed., Ph.D.) is a College Position Analyst at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. Her research interests include community vitality, school councils, Aboriginal issues, and rural education.