

Introduction to Document One

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Red Deer Industrial School

Operating from 1893 to 1919, the Red Deer Industrial School,¹ located approximately six kilometres from what is now Red Deer, Alberta, was managed by the Methodist Missionaries and funded by the federal government. Many Methodist Indian parents from reserves at Whitefish Lake, Saddle Lake, White Whale Lake, Goodfish Lake, Morley and Hobbema sent their children to this institution. While the federal government financed industrial schools, the missionaries were responsible for hiring the staff (with the federal government's consent) and maintaining and repairing the institutions. School inspectors were appointed by the government to inspect these institutions at regular intervals and Indian Agents, as employees of the government, were instructed to co-operate with the school administration.

Returning truant students to schools was one of the functions that an Indian Agent had to perform. In administering this duty in June 1895, Indian Agent Daniel Livingston Clink,² discovered that some of the staff at the Red Deer school were abusing their power and authority by using corporal punishment. The following document,³ a letter that Clink wrote to his superior, Indian Commissioner Amedée E. Forget, describes aspects of the internal life of the school that he found appalling. Clink had known Forget since the 1885 North West Rebellion and later, in 1897, Forget would clear him of fraud charges and ensure that he was paid by the Department of Indian Affairs. In this particular case, the punishments and the lack of control that the Principal, Reverend John Nelson, had over his staff compelled Clink to inform the Indian Commissioner of the mistreatment at the school.

This document demonstrates the concerns and sympathies of one Indian Agent regarding the treatment of Indian students at the industrial school. While his role as Indian Agent is not entirely defined (he is basically just returning truant students to the school), Clink seems to feel that he has no recourse but to bring to the Indian Commissioner's attention the fact that no one seems to represent and support the student's welfare. Who indeed speaks for the Indian students who seem to be at the mercy of some of the members of the staff? In this instance, Nelson was transferred shortly after the letter was written. No doubt Clink's letter contributed to his removal.⁴

Notes

The authors wish to thank William Clink of Toronto, Ontario, the grandson of Daniel L. Clink for providing access to the D.L. Clink Family Papers.

- 1 For the history of the Red Deer Industrial School, see Uta H. Fox, "The Failure of the Red Deer Industrial School" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1993).
- 2 Born in Watford, Ontario in 1841 and died at Battleford in 1918.
- 3 National Archives of Canada, RG10, vol. 3920, file 116,818, D.L. Clink to Indian Commissioner, 4 June 1895.
- 4 It may be of interest to note that Clink was the original partner of P.G. Laurie in the *Saskatchewan Herald*, established in Battleford starting in 1878. Their political differences led to legal action that dissolved the partnership in May 1881. The split between the Liberal Clink and Conservative Laurie defined the political community in Battleford and was a constant threat to Clink throughout his subsequent career with the Department of Indian Affairs. From 1880 to 1885 Clink was a farm instructor at Jack Fish Creek, Moosomin, and Thunderchild reserves. While Laurie published reports of Clink's disputes with Indians on the reserves and criticized his promotions, Clink's superiors seemed pleased with his work. After the release of all farm instructors in the wake of the 1885 Rebellion, Hayter Reed, the Assistant Indian Commissioner from 1883 until 1888 when he was appointed Indian Commissioner, asked that Clink be rehired in Battleford. Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, in a letter to Lawrence VanKaughnet, Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, explained why this might be a problem:

Reed would like to give Clink a trial but the objection I see to him at Battleford is that the Carney and Laurie clique are and have been at logger heads [with him], and I am sure it would have led to trouble. However, Clink is the most earnest employee we have and had taken great interest in the advancement of the Indians under his charge and was certainly more successful than any instructor we have had in advancing Indians. [private letter dated 2 September 1885, Clink Family Papers]

Clink's ongoing dispute with Laurie led to his defeat in the 1888 election for the legislature of the Northwest Territories. Laurie's clique portrayed Clink as sympathetic to the Native cause and quickly put up a Conservative candidate to defeat him. In 1890 Clink moved to Peace Hills (Hobbema) as farm instructor and was immediately promoted to the position of Agent. Though Conservative officials in the middle-ranks of Indian Affairs did not support the move, Clink had ensured his promotion with letters of reference from Reverend John McDougall, Bishop J. Vital, and Father Lestanc. Clink's activities as a Liberal and his reputation as a reformer continued to cause trouble, however. During the 1896 election campaign Reed drafted the following telegram to Clink: "Minister has been informed that you are interfering in politics. If such is the case he says you are to desist forthwith" (telegram dated 26 May 1896, Clink Family Papers).

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C O P Y

Indian Agent's Office
Hobbema
4th June, 1895

Sir:-

I beg to inform you that I have just returned from Red Deer. As I was going down to look for cattle, I took down with me David Baptiste, one of the pupils who had deserted from the school some time ago.

When I went in to the school I told Mr. Nelson, the Principal, that I had brought David down and that Simon's son, Benjamin Boyd, would also come in a few days, as his mother was very sick he had asked for a short time longer.

Mr. Nelson appeared to be very much annoyed and wanted to know why I had brought the boy back; he did not want him. I said to him that I had received instructions from the Department to send those pupils back, but that I would take the boy back if he didn't want him. He said that I could leave him if it was the instructions of the Department, but he would make him toe the mark, that he had been severe with him before but he would be more severe now. I felt that if I left the boy he would be abused. I spoke to Mr. Nelson next day and asked him whether or not I should leave the boy. He said if you take your instructions from me you had better take the boy, but if from the Department you may leave him; in consequence of this I brought the boy home and am awaiting your instructions about him.

Mr. Nelson said that he had as many pupils coming from Saddle Lake Agency as would fill the school. I believe that Mr. McDougall [the Methodist missionary, Reverend John McDougall], while at District Meeting, did get the promise of some, but not enough to fill the school.

I was only at the school a short time on Saturday night and a part of Sunday so that I cannot report fully upon some matters which I consider require the immediate attention of the Department; however there is one case that I did enquire into.

James Bull, a boy from this Agency, was looking at a scrap book which the teacher had told him not to do; the teacher came up and struck him a sharp blow across the head with a stick; the boy, without taking time to think, grabbed the stick from the teacher and struck him back with it; Mr. Skinner regained the stick and struck the boy a severe blow over the head with it.

If memory serves me right, James Bull told me that this occurred on the third of March; there is still a large lump on his head and I think it should be examined by the Doctor.

Mr. McClellan[d], the Farmer, told me that a day or two after the boy was hurt he seemed stupid and not able to do his outside work right; he asked James what was the matter and he answered him that his head was aching, that Mr. Skinner had struck him over the head with a stick.

This man Skinner, who is called a teacher, has had some other disgraceful rows with the larger pupils of the school, lately, but I did not enquire into details as I had no instructions from you to do so, and the Principal told me that I had better mind my own business, adding that "we run this school."

When I first spoke to him about James I asked if he knew that lump was still on his head; he said that he did and the lump was alright there.

After the row was over Mr. Nelson went into the schoolroom and made James apologize to Mr. Skinner; it seems to me that the apology should have come from instead of to this man Skinner.

If the boys are to be flogged and pounded with sticks, it should be done by the Principal and not by his subordinates.

Skinner afterwards told Mr. McClellan[d] that if the boy had attempted to touch him again he would have struck him on the nose with his fist and knocked him down.

What I think should be done in this case would be to bring Skinner before a Magistrate and have him fined and dismissed at once; his actions in this and other cases would not be tolerated in a white school for a single day in any part of Canada.

The experience of teachers who have taught both Indian and White Schools is that the former are much easier managed than the latter.

I am of opinion that a school like Red Deer could be well managed without any whipping, but certainly such brutality as has been going on there should not be tolerated for a moment.

I was told while at the school that this teacher when in a passion gave one of the larger girls a violent shove throwing her whole length on the floor. The girl cried for about half an hour afterwards.

He fought with another of the big girls over a slop bucket, exchanging blows several times.

Notwithstanding all these rows, I am of the opinion that there is very little discipline in the school and from what I saw the big boys and girls were

roaming around together apparently unrestrained and from the statements made to me, by other parties, the moral aspect of affairs is deplorable.

Now if the Department forces the parents of these children to send them to school then they should see that they are properly cared for and not abused.

The Indians have frequently complained to me about their children being improperly treated at this school, and I think that the time has come when the Department should let them see that they will see that they get fair treatment.

I am, &c.,

(Sgd) D.L. Clink

Indian Agent