



# St. Michael's Indian Residential School,

Alert Bay, BC

In 1877, the Church Missionary Society persuaded Rev. James Hall to relocate his Anglican mission at Fort Rupert, BC to nearby Alert Bay. The following year, Rev. Hall built a mission house where day schooling was first provided for native children, mostly drawn from the local reserve—ancestors of today's Nimpkish Band. It would soon be expanded into a full residential school. The mission was located on Cormorant Island, off the northeast shore of Vancouver Island. The adjacent village of Alert Bay soon became a thriving commercial fishing centre, the livelihood for native and non-native alike.

As Alert Bay was an ocean port and close to the shipping lanes along the B.C. coast, the Anglican Mission was well situated to offer schooling for First Nations children drawn from communities along the North Coast between Alert Bay and the Naas River, including the Queen Charlotte Islands. The only other Anglican boarding school on the coast had been in operation briefly at the fledgling Metlakatla Mission, near Prince Rupert; it closed about 1878.

## Milestones

1882	Residential school for boys and girls established at the Mission House. A few girls board at the rectory with Mrs. Hall, wife of the missionary.	1894	Boys' Industrial School opens (a residential facility, separate from the mission day school which continues in operation).
1883	First government grant received for operation of the school.	1905	Boys' Industrial School enlarged and new dormitory built, with capacity for 40 boys. By 1928, the last year of its use, 43 boys were in residence.
1890	Indian Agency moved from Fort Rupert to Alert Bay. Agency will have a long-term relationship with the school, inspecting conditions and approving enrolment.	1895-1905	Boarding School for Girls recognized by Ottawa and new annual grant provided for 10 years.
1891	Government sets aside 412 acres at western extremity of Cormorant Island to be known as the Alert Bay Indian Industrial School Reserve (separate from the adjacent Nimpkish Indian lands). For decades, this forested land would supply the school with firewood for heating and cooking. In later years, cleared areas would be used for farming and pasture, as the school strove to be more self-sufficient.	1906-1911	Girls' Home closed due to dwindling enrolment and lack of funding.
		1912 Sept.	New Alert Bay Girls' Home opens, with authorization for 30 pupils. It is government owned and will be operated as a Diocesan school until 1922.
		1922	New Indian Residential School Commission (later Indian School Administration) of MSCC formed to administer most Anglican residential schools, including Alert Bay, which had been operated in turn by the Church Missionary Society and the Diocese of Columbia.



1929 Nov. 2 Large new amalgamated (co-ed) residential school building opens, with capacity for 200 students. Constructed by the government and dedicated “St. Michael’s Indian Residential School,” it is the largest school under Anglican administration. Former Girls’ Home modified for use as classroom block; former Boys’ Home razed.

1939 Feb. 21 St. Michael’s School Preventorium opens with accommodation for 18 tuberculosis patients drawn from the residential school as well as other patients convalescing from Nanaimo and Miller Bay Hospitals.

1946 Classroom block in old Girls’ Home abandoned after building declared a firetrap and subsequently torn down.

1948 Students formerly eligible to attend St. Michael’s begin to make increasing use of new Indian day schools set up or soon to open near their reserves. Enrolment at Alert Bay starts to decline.

1950 Provincial order in council severs former “Industrial School Reserve” lands, allotting 352 acres to the local Nimpkish Band and retaining 60 acres for use by St. Michael’s School.

1950s Students remaining in residence at St. Michael’s spend more of their school years attending public and native day schools in Alert Bay, with secondary education offered at the local high school. School takes on increasing role as a hostel.

1957 Preventorium closes.

1961 Indian Affairs reduces enrolment to 170, due to the re-location of pupilage and recent structural modifications that had reduced the dormitory space. Further reductions in the

resident student population would continue in the 1960s with the facility appropriately renamed, St. Michael’s Hostel.

1968 Last complete year of Anglican administration with 163 students in residence, representing 20 bands drawn from five Indian Agencies: Kwawkwewlth, Terrace, Bella Coola, Skeena and Labine.

1969 Apr. 1 Indian Affairs takes over St. Michael’s Hostel and renames it Alert Bay Student Residence. Enrolment is 157, comprising children in Grades 1 to 7 (ages 6 to 15). Most of the Anglican staff, including former Principal (now Administrator), Mr. J. Warner, stay with the hostel and become government employees.

1974 Dec. 31 After five years of plummeting enrolment (48 in residence at close of the ’73-’74 year), the hostel closes and is turned over to the Nimpkish Band. Only four children arrived in September. Most native children are billeted elsewhere in Alert Bay, as arranged by the Nimpkish Band.

1975 Building is acquired by the ‘Namgis First Nation for administrative use and ultimately (2003) renamed ‘Namgis House’.



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