



# St. Peter's School

Hay River, N.W.T

The community of Hay River, Northwest Territories, is situated at the mouth of its namesake river, which empties into Great Slave Lake. This lake, the fifth largest in North America, is drained by the legendary Mackenzie River, which flows almost 1,800 km north to the Beaufort Sea. For thousands of years, aboriginal peoples have used this great waterway (known by natives in recent generations as Deh Cho) for migration and access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds. In Victorian times, the Slavey people (ancestors of today's Dene Nation) gathered at Hay River to exploit the area's excellent fishing. As the fur trade flourished in the 19th century, the North West Company and competing Hudson's Bay Company established many posts along the Mackenzie and around Great Slave Lake. In 1821, the HBC bought out its rival and secured a monopoly in this area.

Most HBC posts attracted small seasonal settlements of native families engaged in the fur trade. Anglican and Catholic missionaries soon followed, setting up permanent missions in many places. At Hay River, an HBC post was established in 1868 and a Roman Catholic Mission followed a year later. The region's first Indian boarding school was established in 1867 by the Catholic Grey Nuns at Fort Providence on the Mackenzie River, 100 km northwest of Hay River.

In 1892 a small group of Dene, led by Chief Chiatlo, established a permanent encampment at the mouth of the Hay River, on the east bank opposite Vale Island (named later in honour of the long serving Anglican missionary). At the request of the Chief, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) sent Thomas Jabez Marsh to set up the first Anglican mission in this native community. Marsh (later Rev.) arrived in June 1893 and, with the help of local Dene and fellow lay missionary and contractor Sheridan Lawrence, started work on erecting mission buildings.

That fall, Marsh started a day school for a handful of students at his temporary quarters. In May 1894, St. Peter's Mission formally opened and the day school moved to the completed mission house. The following year a dormitory was added for the school's first seven boarders who came from the Anglican Mission at Fort Resolution after the day school there had closed. In the late 1890s, St. Peter's was unable to take in boarders, due in part to the financial difficulties experienced by its sponsor, the London-based CMS.

In 1900 the federal government started a program of modest financial assistance to the church run Indian schools, following the signing of Treaty 8 that year by most aboriginal Indian peoples in the Great Slave Lake area. However, 75 years would pass before the Hay River Reserve (Kat'odeeche First Nation) was established for the local Dene. It remains the only constituted reserve in the Northwest Territories. Land claims by other Dene and Métis groups have yet to be resolved.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, residential enrolment remained high at St. Peter's School, usually 30-40 students. Initially, the school was intended for status Indian children within the area covered by Treaty 8. However, Indian Affairs often approved the admittance of white and Métis children, especially orphans or those from destitute families. As well, several Inuit children were enrolled, having received territorial government grants. They travelled great distances from the Arctic coast settlements, often from communities where Anglican missions existed. St. Peter's School was known as the first Anglican "Indian and Eskimo" residential school.



a student body comprising almost equal numbers of status Indian (Dene) and Inuit children. The dormitories at St. Peter's were vacated in June 1937 and that fall St. Peter's Day School opened in a separate building near the old school. For many years, it served native children from the Hay River area and was administered by the Anglican Diocese of Athabasca. The large Roman Catholic residential school at nearby Fort Providence continued to take in boarders until 1953.

## Milestones

Unlike the Church's schools to the south, farming activity at Hay River was restrained, due to the climate. The school's modest vegetable garden was best known for its potato crop. The bountiful waters near Hay River assured an unlimited supply of fish for the school's menu. An expert fisherman was a valuable staff member.

In 1907, Rev. Alfred James Vale was appointed missionary and school principal at Hay River. During his 20 years at St. Peter's, he oversaw the replacement of the original collection of primitive school buildings with a large new structure, which was built by the Church in 1917. He also secured federal money to remodel an old mission building in 1925, moving it next to the school and outfitting it as a fully equipped hospital.

The Diocese of Mackenzie River assumed responsibility for the school in 1911 when it signed an agreement with the government, which detailed Ottawa's funding contribution and the Church's obligation to maintain the facilities and supply staff. The Church Missionary Society continued to provide small grants until 1923 when operation was taken over by the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC). Many other Anglican Indian residential schools in Canada also came under the MSCC wing at this time.

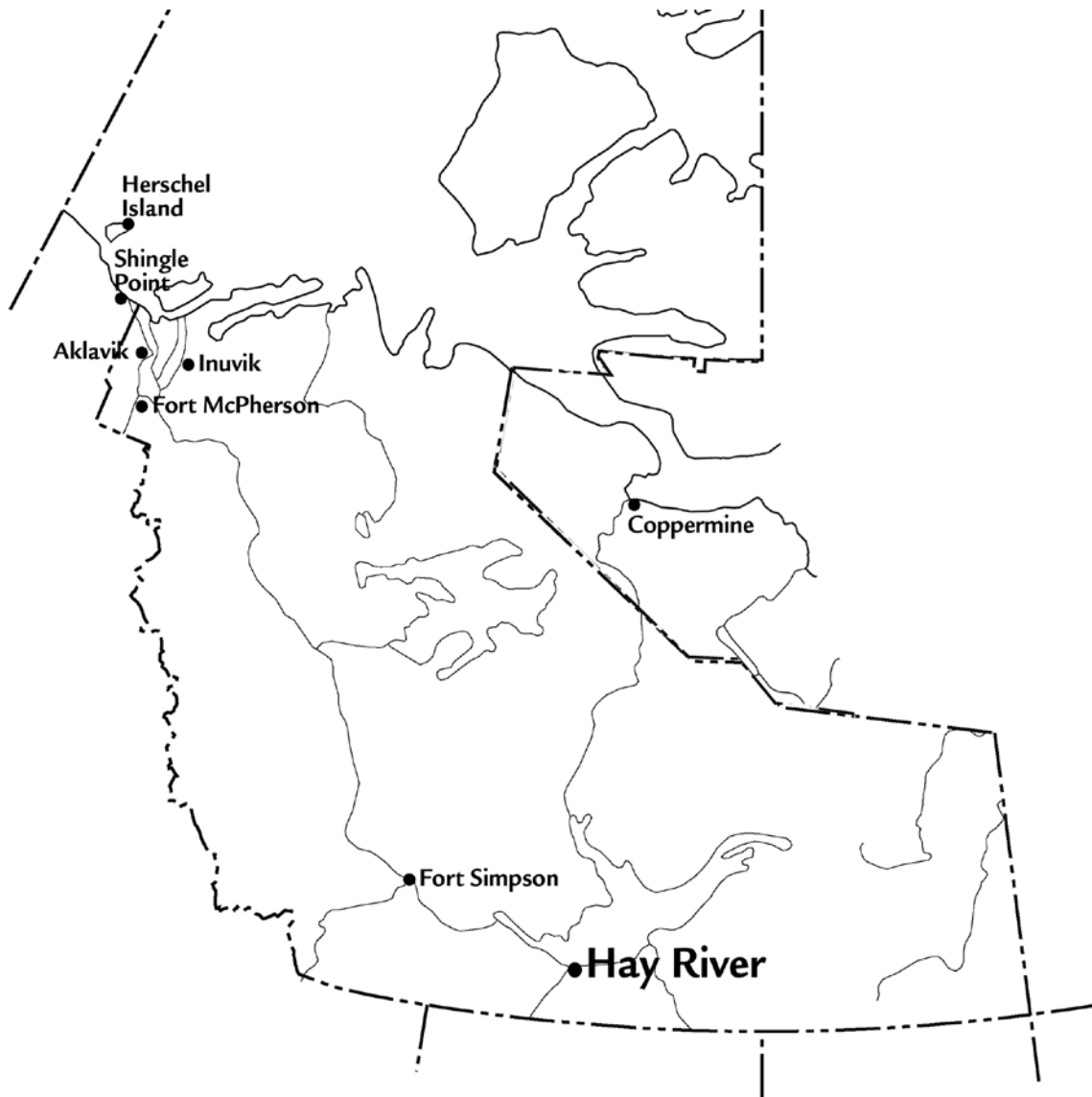
In the 1920s, the Church and government recognized the growing need to establish a residential school to better serve Inuit children and be closer to their traditional territory. Students of Anglican parents from such communities as Herschel Island and Church mission posts along the Arctic coast were being sent to St. Peter's at Hay River, about 1,500 km to the south. Consequently in 1929, the government and church set up the experimental Shingle Point Eskimo Residential School, situated on the Yukon coast about 100 km west of the Mackenzie delta.

The community of Aklavik, near the Mackenzie delta, became a major trading and government administrative centre during the 1920s, as the north was opening up. As part of the community's strategic plan, the Church and Indian Affairs partnered in establishing a new residential school here, to replace the Shingle Point and Hay River schools. All Saints Indian Residential School opened in 1936 with

- 1894 St. Peter's Mission and Day School opens, sponsored by Church Missionary Society.
- 1895 Dormitory addition accommodates 7 pupils formerly attending Anglican Mission Day School at Fort Resolution, now closed.
- 1896–1899 St. Peter's operates as a Day School for most of this period due to lack of church funds to support residential students.
- 1899–1900 Local Dene bands sign Treaty 8 and adhesions, assuring creation of future reserve and government support of schools for treaty children.
- 1911 Operating agreement signed between Ottawa and Bishop of the Yukon (representing Diocese of Mackenzie River), outlining funding formula, standards for student enrolment and Church's obligation to maintain facilities and provide staff. Authorized pupilage is 25 but number will be exceeded in years ahead due to admission of non-native children.
- 1917 Church constructs larger new school to replace scattered complex of original buildings. Authorized pupilage is 40, with 34 enrolled in the first school year.
- 1923 School administration is transferred from Diocese to MSCC agency, the Indian and Eskimo School Commission. Residential students reach peak enrolment of 56.
- 1929 Temporary Shingle Point Residential School (St. John's Mission) opens for Inuit children, many of whom would have been sent to distant Hay River School, whose student body now comprises mostly treaty Indian children and some Métis.
- 1929–1936 Residential enrolment is reduced to less than 20 in most years due to absence of Inuit students.

1936 Sept. All Saints Anglican Indian Residential School opens at Aklavik, accommodating students formerly attending Shingle Point School (closed previous month) and most residential students at Hay River School, which is falling into state of disrepair (collapsing foundation).

1937 Hay River Residential School closes in June and remaining students transfer to new "Indian and Eskimo" residential school at Aklavik. St. Peter's Indian Day School, operated by Anglican Diocese of Athabasca, opens in new premises in September for native children from Hay River community.



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