

La Tuque School

Quebec

In the fifteen years following World War II, the number of Indian children attending schools (government, church or native run) in Canada doubled from 20,000 to about 40,000. Those attending high school grew by 400 per cent in this period. By 1960, Ottawa projected the need for 60 new classrooms a year, just to keep up with population growth and to replace outdated buildings. First Nations communities, soon empowered to establish their own schools, also could not keep pace with demand and acquiesced to continued government involvement in educating their children.

In this context and in Quebec, Indian Affairs made plans for a large centrally located residential school at La Tuque, 150 km north of Trois Rivieres. It would serve primarily non-French speaking Protestant children from Cree communities in the western interior of Quebec. At the time, the only Anglican run school in the Province was at Fort George, the few remaining residential schools being operated by Roman Catholic Orders. An urban location with close proximity to municipal elementary and high schools was an important criterion for selecting La Tuque. The school would be built by the government on 9.7 acres of land (purchased by Ottawa in 1958) and managed by the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC). It was the last new church run school to open before the government assumed management of all residential schools in 1969. There was no local Anglican mission associated with the school.

Construction commenced in 1962 and the La Tuque Indian Residential School opened in September 1963 with capacity for 250 native children. Prior to opening, from December 1962 to June 1963, the partially completed building was leased to La Tuque Catholic Board of School Trustees to accommodate about 600 French Canadian day students whose school had just been destroyed by fire.

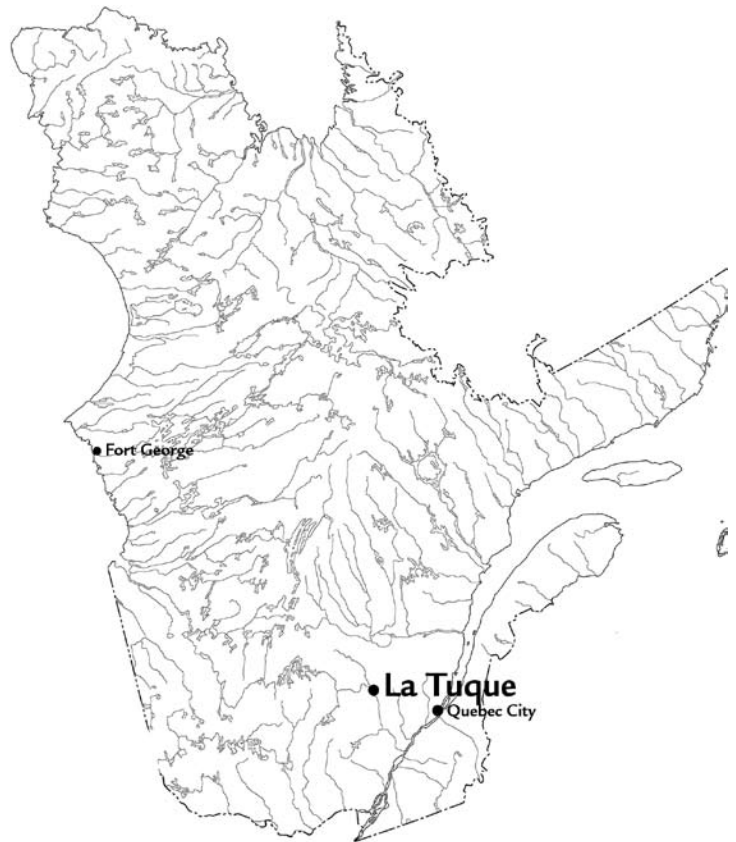
Teaching staff at the residential school were recruited by the government, with support workers selected by the school's Anglican principal. French was first proposed as the language of instruction but Indian Affairs recommended English as most students had no knowledge of French, being either English speaking or fluent only in their native tongue. The majority of students were drawn from the Mistissini Band (baptized Anglicans). In later years increasing numbers of children from the Waswanipi Band were enrolled along with small numbers from other inland bands. Due to frequent overcrowding at St. Philip's School at Fort George, some of its students from coastal bands were accepted at La Tuque.

The residential school's classrooms were dedicated for primary schooling (Ontario curriculum, soon replaced with that of Quebec) while high school students, about a third of the boarders, attended La Tuque English Protestant School. Conversely, non-native students in grades six to eight from the town school attended the residential school for shop and home economics classes. This close relationship between the two schools fostered many joint social activities and inter-school sports competition. As well, the Catholic Indian residential school at nearby Pointe Bleue (Lac Ste-Jean) was an arch rival in hockey and track and field competition with its sister school at La Tuque.

From April 1, 1969 until final closing June 30, 1978, the government was completely responsible for the school's operation. By the mid-1970s the majority of students were receiving instruction in French. Following the school's closing, most native children were educated at new schools set up at their reserves, managed jointly by the Cree School Board formed in 1978. There was never any interest by native groups in taking over the closed La Tuque School which remained derelict and vandalized for many years. It was finally torn down in February 2006 with the active participation of many former students.

Milestones

- 1958 Indian Affairs decides to establish residential school in the city centre of La Tuque. 9.7 acres of land are purchased from the Canadian International Paper Company. School's proposed name is Abitibi Indian Residential School.
- 1963 Sept. La Tuque Indian Residential School opens with authorized pupilage of 250, soon to be exceeded.
- 1964 April 23 Official opening and benediction of the school, presided over by the Bishop of Quebec, Russel Brown, Federal Deputy Minister Jean Chrétien and other first nations and government leaders.
- 1964 Sept. 263 students are in residence and 97 of these attend La Tuque Protestant School. Non-native children from the municipal school attend the residential school for shop and home economics classes.
- 1965 Sept. Maximum 264 students are in residence. An additional seven girls are boarded out in private homes. Six classrooms are in operation for 160 students in the junior grades. Quebec English Protestant school curriculum adopted. 95 students, all from Mistissini, attend La Tuque High School.
- 1967 All students make trip to Montreal for two-day visit to Expo 67. Thirty honour students spend a week, as guests of Montreal's Riverdale High School, which becomes an informal "twin" with La Tuque School with future exchanges of students.
- 1968 Unilingual Administrator replaced by tri-lingual Principal (Cree included). Some French speaking Anglican boarders attend French Roman Catholic School in La Tuque but are not required to take classes in religious studies. Within eight years, 90 per cent of students will receive instruction in French, at town schools or in the residential school's classrooms.
- 1969 April 1 Government assumes management of school, which is renamed La Tuque Indian Student Residence. Many Anglican support workers stay on staff and transfer to federal payroll.
- 1970 Government transfers administration of classroom block to La Tuque Protestant School Board, an arrangement to continue until ultimate closure of school.
- 1978 June 30 La Tuque Student Residence closes. Cree School Board is formed to oversee native run schools close to reserves. School property and buildings are declared surplus and conveyed to Public Works Canada for disposal.
- 2006 Derelict school buildings torn down to make way for development.



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