



Old Sun School

Gleichen, AB

The signing of Treaty 7 in September 1877 established reserves for all aboriginal peoples living in today's southern Alberta. With the exception of the Sarcee and Stoney Indians, most native groups were part of the Blackfoot Confederacy, which included the Northern Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood and North Peigan. Their American cousins, the South Peigan, occupied the large Blackfeet Indian Reservation in neighbouring Montana.

Anglican missionary work among the Canadian Blackfoot and Sarcee nations began almost immediately once these reserves were established. Rev. John W. Tims established a mission on the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve near Gleichen in 1883. The Siksika Reserve straddled the Bow River about 70 km east of Calgary. The Canadian Pacific Railway, completed in 1885, also ran through this territory. Blackfoot Crossing, on the eastern side of the Siksika Reserve, was the site of the Treaty 7 signing.

Rev. (later Archdeacon) Tims spent forty years in mission work among the aboriginal groups in southern Alberta. He founded and became general superintendent and financial agent of the Calgary Indian Missions, a Diocesan agency which co-ordinated support for Anglican work on four reserves—Sarcee, Peigan, Blood and Siksika. The Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches were also active in the Treaty 7 area.

The Siksika Reserve mission was the principal focus of Archdeacon Tims' work. In 1886, he established the Old Sun Boarding School about 7 km west of Gleichen, followed by a new school for boys only (the White Eagle Boarding School) eight years later. In 1901, boys and girls were enrolled together in the remodelled Old Sun Boarding School, an amalgamation of the two schools. It was named after Old Sun, a revered medicine man, warrior and leader of one of the largest Blackfoot Confederacy bands. Old Sun's followers occupied the North Camp Flats on the Reserve where Anglican mission work was centred. Old Sun, who died here in 1897, tolerated the Church's work but was never evangelized.

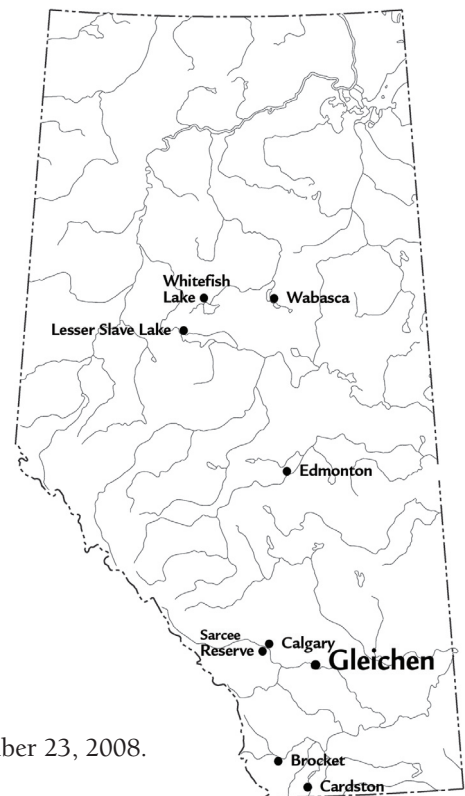
Mission activity on the Siksika Reserve was difficult and made worse by the failing health of most of the reserve's inhabitants. Within a few years of the 1877 Treaty, the Siksika Reserve population dwindled from about 2,000 to less than 600 due to diseases contracted through frequent contact with white settlers and the railway builders. In the decade before WWI, disease outbreaks at the Old Sun School affected most of the student body, causing many deaths, quarantines and several temporary school closings ordered by the government. By 1930, the birth rate barely exceeded the mortality rate among these Blackfoot people.

In 1911, the government agreed to provide long term funding for the school and a larger building was constructed at South Camp the following year. It was expanded a decade later to accommodate more students. The school's farm, first located at the North Camp and expanded at the South Camp, provided important vocational training for boys. After World War II, boys remained in school all day as more senior students attended Provincial schools in town. Fire destroyed the frame school building in 1928 and it was soon replaced by a substantial brick building. The school was taken over by the government in 1969, with many former Anglican support staff transferring to federal payroll. It survives today as part of the native run Old Sun Community College complex, a satellite campus of Mount Royal College.



Milestones

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| 1883 | Church Missionary Society (CMS) establishes Anglican mission on the Siksika (Blackfoot) Reserve, with Rev. John W. Tims in charge. | 1959 | High school students boarding at Old Sun attend local Provincial schools. |
| 1886 | Old Sun Boarding School, for boys and girls, opens at North Camp on the Reserve with enrolment of fifteen pupils. | 1960 | Authorized enrolment increased to 142 |
| 1893 | White Eagles Boarding School at South Camp opens for boys who vacate Old Sun School, which is now reserved for girls. | 1966 | All residential students, except those in kindergarten and grade 1, attend eight Provincial schools within 30-mile radius of reserve. School's Midget hockey team wins Indian Hockey Tournament for southern Alberta held in Calgary. |
| 1901 | White Eagles Boarding School closes and boys return to original Old Sun Boarding School, which is remodelled. The White Eagles building is used as an isolation ward during 1902-1903 smallpox epidemic. | 1967 | 94 children are in residence. |
| 1907-1911 | Rampant disease outbreaks in the residential school and recurring unsanitary conditions force government to close the school for extended periods. Needed renovations are stalled due to lack of funding. From July 1909 to December 1911, the building is used as a day school. | 1969 April 1 | Government assumes control of school, which is named Old Sun Student Residence. Kindergarten classes are continued in largely vacant building. |
| 1912 July 14 | Large new residential school opens with authorized pupilage of forty. | 1971 Sept. | Government reduces dormitory capacity to 75 as Mount Royal College takes over most of building for use as a Native Learning Centre (vocational studies) for adult education. Campus is known as the Old Sun Community College. |
| 1922 | Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC) and government agree to have MSCC (Indian and Eskimo School Commission) operate the school commencing January 1923. Government offers new funding support. Reconstruction of buildings is prolonged forcing cancellation of fall term. | 1978 | Old Sun Community College becomes separate institution run by the Blackfoot Nation. |
| 1928 June 27 | Old Sun Indian Residential School is destroyed by fire. Day school classes are offered for three years until replacement school is built. | | |
| 1931 Feb. 17 | Replacement residential school building, constructed by government, opens with capacity for 110 students. 72 pupils are registered this year. | | |
| 1952 | Separate day school established adjacent to residential school to relieve classroom shortage. | | |
| 1956-1962 | Residential students are enrolled from Blood, Peigan and Crowfoot Reserves. | | |



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