



# Shingle Point School

Yukon

St. John's Anglican Mission at Shingle Point, Yukon Territory was established in 1922 following the closure of the Herschel Island mission, which had been founded in the early 1890s. Shingle Point is on the Beaufort Sea coast, about 100 km northwest of Aklavik and 80 km east of Hershel Island (Qikiqtaruk), which lies just offshore near the Alaska boundary.

Missionary activity on Herschel Island began as a means to stem the corrupting influence American commercial whalers had on the local Inuvialuit, following the establishment of a whaling station on the island in 1889. By the mid-1890s, the winter population had swelled to about 1,500, including hundreds of men assigned to whaling vessels and many more Inuit from the Mackenzie Delta area and Gwich'in from the Yukon interior. In addition to trade goods needed by the region's native inhabitants, the Americans also introduced alcohol and disease, which soon decimated much of the local Inuvialuit population.

The island's notoriety appalled the Anglican Church, prompting the region's new missionary, Rev. Isaac Stringer, to investigate matters first hand and provide any assistance possible to help turn things around. Upon his arrival in 1893, the whaling captains (who nominally imposed law before the RCMP arrived in 1903) welcomed Stringer, who succeeded in curbing some of the local debauchery during this and subsequent visits he made from his permanent station at the Peel River Mission (Fort McPherson). In spring 1897, Stringer and his wife, Sadie, arrived to set up a permanent Anglican mission at Pauline Cove on Herschel Island, under the auspices of the Diocese of Mackenzie River. A day school was quickly established and, at the end of the Stringers' posting in 1901, most of the surviving Inuvialuit had been evangelized.

With the collapse of the whaling market 1907, the Americans soon returned to Alaska and many aboriginals from Herschel dispersed to their traditional homelands in the western Arctic. In 1905 Stringer was consecrated as the second Bishop of Selkirk (Yukon), and he continued to take a great interest in the affairs of Herschel Island, which was now under his jurisdiction. Having observed the further decline of this Arctic mission, served mostly by itinerant missionaries, Bishop Stringer decided in 1920 to have it re-established at nearby Shingle Point on the mainland. Here was a thriving trading centre, complete with Hudson's Bay Company post and settlement that was home to many former Islanders.

The church and mission house at Shingle Point were completed in 1922 and a day school was started for local Inuvialuit children. Sixty students were enrolled the first year, with an average attendance of forty. However, attendance was poor in the following years as children remained for longer periods with their families who were engaged in hunting and trapping far away from Shingle Point. The mission school was then operated only intermittently and finally closed in 1925 when an influenza epidemic was spreading throughout the region.

In the mid-1920s, native leaders from the Mackenzie Delta and western Arctic called for the church and government to establish a residential school for the Inuit. Most of the aboriginal people in the region were evangelized Anglicans and many adults had attended the distant St. Peter's Indian Residential School at Hay River. As the government investigated the matter, the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC) took the initiative and selected Shingle Point as a satisfactory site for a temporary or experimental "Eskimo boarding school." It would be operated by the MSCC and supported by its Arctic



Mission Fund, established in 1926-27 with seed money from MSCC and grants from the HBC, private donations and several church societies in England. The Arctic Mission also supported the activities of all Anglican missionaries in the Arctic region as the Diocese of the Arctic had not yet been created. The MSCC, by this time, had gained experience operating many of the Church's Indian residential schools "south of 60."

There was some urgency in establishing the Shingle Point school as the Roman Catholic Church had just opened its first "Eskimo and Indian" residential school at Aklavik. In 1928, Ottawa gave its approval and provided a capital grant for the Anglican school, whose primary role was to provide schooling for the Inuvialuit. Construction commenced in the spring of 1929 and St. John's Eskimo Residential School at Shingle Point opened that August, with 17 children in residence and six attending as day students.

As the institution was deemed to be temporary, little money was spent on the facilities. The school complex comprised an assortment of former HBC structures, church mission buildings and remodelled log cabins vacated by local Inuvialuit. The Arctic coast was littered with driftwood, which was harvested as an inexpensive source of construction timber. Only half the government's building grant was used, the unspent balance being applied later to the permanent replacement school at Aklavik, opened in 1936.

Life was harsh at Shingle Point. St. John's School complex was situated on a windswept sand spit, exposed to high tides, Arctic gales and blizzards and often overrun by beached ice floes during spring break up. In winter's total darkness, the scattered school buildings were linked with rope lifelines as a safety measure to prevent students from getting lost during frequent storms.

Despite these hardships, enrolment doubled in the second year and a waiting list for residential students soon developed. Some children came from the high Arctic, up to 1,000 km away. The school also accommodated a small number of day students, the children of Inuvialuit families that camped at Shingle Point for extended periods. Unlike the vocational skills (farming, carpentry, etc.) taught at residential schools to the south, the school boys at Shingle Point were taught to hunt caribou, fish and fowl, and whales, as well as given instruction in making nets and pro-

cessing their catches. Native instructors were employed to lend their hunting skills to the boys and sewing and cooking skills to the girls.

In 1932, Archdeacon Archibald Fleming, Executive Director of the Arctic Mission, believed the school's experimental stage was over and he pressed Indian Affairs to address the urgent need for a permanent Anglican residential school. There were mounting concerns over Shingle Point's severe weather, remote location, primitive facilities, insufficient space and general health issues, which included bad drinking water, poor sanitation, and lack of a resident doctor. Aklavik, situated in the Mackenzie River Delta, was subsequently confirmed as the government's favoured site for a large Anglican school to accommodate up to 120 boarders. The school would take in Indian and Inuit children from the Mackenzie Delta and coastal areas, but initially most would transfer from the Hay River and Shingle Point schools due to be closed. When All Saints Indian and Eskimo Residential School at Aklavik opened August 30, 1936, all 48 boarders and day students from Shingle Point moved to Aklavik.

## Milestones

- 1922 St. John's Mission and Day School opens at Shingle Point, on the Yukon's Arctic coast, 40 km west of the Mackenzie Delta.
- 1923-25 Erratic attendance at Shingle Point Day School prompts Church and government to seek site for a residential school, dedicated to educating the Inuvialuit from the Mackenzie Delta area.
- 1924 Amendment to the Indian Act places Eskimo administration under Indian Affairs Department. Prior to 1924, Eskimos (Inuit) were informally regulated by Ottawa.
- 1925-29 Major influenza epidemic in the region forces Day School to close.
- 1926 Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC) establishes agency, the Arctic Mission, to coordinate funding for all missions and schools in the far north for the Inuit. MSCC favours Shingle Point as the site for a temporary boarding school, while government examines other sites.
- 1927 Federal Order-in-Council transfers Eskimo administration to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. In future, NWT will



provide most of the operational funding for educating Inuit children, with capital grants from Ottawa for facilities.

- 1928 Department of the Interior approves Shingle Point site and provides \$10,000 capital grant for remodelling existing mission and HBC buildings and former homes of local Inuit.
- 1929 Sept. St. John's Eskimo Residential School opens at Shingle Point, with 17 boarders and 6 day students.
- 1931-32 Peak enrolment reached with 44 children in residence.
- 1936 Aug. Residential school closes and student body (boarders and day students) are transferred to newly opened All Saints Indian and Eskimo Residential School at Aklavik.



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