



All Saints School

Aklavik, NWT

Aklavik, NWT, is located on the west side of the Mackenzie River Delta (Peel Channel), about 110 km upstream from the Arctic coast. The community formally dates from 1912 when the Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post to serve the Inuvialuit, Gwich'in and Métis peoples in the region. Aklavik enjoyed a close proximity to the sea and Yukon's North Slope area, which, until the 1980s, provided much of the community with good livelihoods through trapping, hunting and fishing. Due to its strategic location, Aklavik became the western Arctic's main commercial and government administrative centre in the 1920s. By 1930 its population reached 400 and by 1952 it had peaked at about 1600, with an influx of several hundred more in summer. The community is located in the Gwich'in Settlement Area, established in 1993 as part of the Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement signed by Ottawa and the Gwich'in peoples of the lower Mackenzie region.

All Saints Anglican Mission was founded at Aklavik in 1919 by Bishop James Richard Lucas of the Diocese of Mackenzie River. Day schooling for native children was provided by the post's first missionary, Rev. Edward Hester. Some children, especially orphans and those from destitute native families in the delta area, were sent far south to St. Peter's Residential School at Hay River. With the signing of treaty 11 in 1921, more "treaty children" from the local Gwich'in community (ancestors of today's Loucheux Bands) were enrolled at Hay River as part of the treaty obligations. Inuvialuit children of the delta and coastal areas had little opportunity for comprehensive schooling until the experimental Shingle Point Residential School opened in 1929.

Both Shingle Point and Hay River schools were poorly situated and each facility was primitive, of limited capacity, and becoming run down. The Anglican Church pressed the government to build a large residential school in the delta area for Inuit and Gwich'in children drawn from the broad Arctic area. Aklavik became the preferred site for separate Catholic and Anglican "Indian and Eskimo" schools. The Catholic Immaculate Conception Residential School opened in 1925, followed by the Anglican All Saints Residential School in 1936. Government funding for the latter was held up due to the onset of the Great Depression.

Management of the All Saints School was assigned to the Indian and Eskimo School Commission of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC). At the time, MSCC operated most of the almost two dozen Anglican Indian residential schools in Canada, from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific and to the Arctic coast. The new Aklavik School was a two-storey frame structure, above the ground and resting on piles sunk into the deep permafrost. The building was initially lit with oil lamps but outfitted with direct current electric lighting in 1938. For many years, wood fuel was used for heating and cooking, with about 200 cords of wood consumed each year. It was impossible to grow food on site for the school, due to the extreme climate and poor soil. The school's kitchen received some of its produce from the garden farms at the Anglican Mission and HBC post at Fort Simpson, about 1200 km up the Mackenzie River.



All Saints had a capacity for 150 residential students, but the authorized pupilage in the early years was limited to 100. Instruction was given from Kindergarten to Grade 8. Administrators strove to enrol equal numbers of Inuit and Native Indian students, with per capita grants provided by the federal Indian Affairs Branch (for native “treaty students”) and by the Territorial Government (for Inuit students). The Arctic Mission Fund, set up by MSCC in 1926, and the new Diocese of the Arctic, created out of Mackenzie River in 1933, also provided small operational grants to the All Saints School and other Anglican missionary undertakings throughout the Arctic.

In 1952, the federal government opened a large new integrated day school, which gave rise to an influx of new boarders at the All Saints School. The classrooms at the residential school were then closed. With dormitories filled to capacity, many Anglican students had to be temporarily housed at the Catholic Residential School. This situation was untenable for the Diocese and MSCC, who jointly agreed to construct a dormitory extension to their All Saints School to accommodate an additional 70 students. Materials were shipped and construction was scheduled for the summer of 1954. However, the federal government stopped all work, as planning was underway to move the entire Aklavik community to a more satisfactory site in the Mackenzie Delta area.

Aklavik had always been prone to spring floods but, after World War II, the town’s growing pains and poor sanitation facilities had reached crisis proportions. With limited land available and the local environment threatened, Ottawa felt the community should be relocated. Several sites on both sides of the delta were prime candidates, with East 3 or New Aklavik (soon named Inuvik) being selected in late 1954. Inuvik was on the East Channel of the Mackenzie River Delta, 60 km east of Aklavik. The new town was up and running in 1960.

As part of the relocation, All Saints Student Residence was closed in June 1959 and most staff and students were moved in September to the large government hostel at Inuvik. The facility had two wings—the Anglican Stringer Hall and Catholic Grollier Hall. Aklavik survives today as a smaller hamlet of about 600 people, with a continuing Anglican presence manifested by its surviving All Saints Church.

Milestones

- 1912 Hudson’s Bay Post established; Aklavik soon becomes an organized community and major trading centre as dozens of native families settle here in following decade.
- 1919 All Saints Mission and Church Day School founded.
- 1921 Treaty 11 signed, assuring government support of residential and day schools for treaty children of the local Gwich’in people (Loucheux Band No. 7). Until local boarding school is built, native children (mostly Gwich’in) are sent to Anglican Hay River School, opened 1917, and to the Shingle Point School (for Inuvialuit), opened 1929.
- 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.



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| 1936 Sept. | All Saints Indian and Eskimo Residential School opens. Most students enrolled have transferred from the Shingle Point and Hay River Schools, now closed. | 1954 Nov. | Inuvik chosen as site for new commercial and government centre for the western Arctic, with construction to begin in 1955 and completion planned by 1960. |
| 1952 | Federal Day School opens; All Saints classroom block closes and facility assumes role as hostel. Influx of Inuit children from western Arctic taxes dormitory space, now at capacity (150 students). Overflow accommodated at Immaculate Conception (Catholic) Residential School. | 1959 June | All Saints Student Residence closes. Most students transfer to new government hostel at Inuvik to open in September—Stringer Hall for Anglican students and Grollier Hall for Catholic students. Some Gwich'in children from Aklavik are sent to Fleming Hall, the Anglican hostel at Fort McPherson, which opened in 1958. |
| 1954 Spring | MSCC and Diocese are ready to start construction on 70-bed dormitory extension to All Saints, a project approved and funded in 1953. Government stops work as it plans to relocate entire community of Aklavik to new site in Mackenzie Delta. | | |



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