



Bompas Hall

Fort Simpson, NWT

Fort Simpson, NWT is situated on an island at the confluence of the Liard and Mackenzie Rivers. Generations of Dene have known this location as Liidlii Kue, meaning “place where the rivers come together.” It was named Fort of the Forks by early white traders and it was here the Northwest Company established a fur trading post in 1804. Following amalgamation with the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1821, the post was rebuilt and renamed Fort Simpson in honour of Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Company. It gave rise to the first permanent settlement on the Mackenzie, dating from 1822.

The HBC post at “Simpson” was the largest and most important of the nine posts to be established in the Mackenzie District. It served as the Company’s administrative centre for the region. Its strategic location, temperate climate and rich soil allowed the HBC to operate profitable vegetable gardens and a livestock farm, which were an important source of local fresh food for other posts, future settlements and church missions down the Mackenzie River. Fort Simpson soon gained the moniker, ‘Garden of the Mackenzie’.

The great Mackenzie River (Deh Cho) extends almost 1,800 km from Great Slave Lake to the Beaufort Sea. For thousands of years, this waterway was used by aboriginal peoples for migration and access to traditional hunting grounds and for about 150 years it was the marine highway for HBC’s supply boats—canoe, York boat and steamboat. Missionaries followed the traders and eventually established permanent mission stations adjacent to most of the HBC posts. At Simpson, Anglican and Roman Catholic priests arrived in the late 1850s. Here, as elsewhere “north of 60”, intense rivalry between the two churches continued for several decades.

In 1858 St. David’s Anglican Mission was established at Fort Simpson by Archdeacon James Hunter, during his missionary circuit of the Mackenzie District. A small log church was erected three years later. In late 1865, Rev. William Carpenter Bompas was appointed to the wide ranging missionary circuit of the Yukon (Diocese of Rupert’s Land). He arrived at St. David’s Church on Christmas Day to begin his 9-year service in this capacity. Bompas was subsequently installed as the First Bishop of Athabasca (1874), Mackenzie River (1884) and Selkirk (1891)—all new dioceses created out of Rupert’s Land. His work ensured a sound footing for many Anglican missions and for his successors that would serve in this remote area of northwest Canada.

The Roman Catholic presence at Simpson also dates from 1858 when Oblate Father Henri Grollier arrived and conducted many baptisms. However, 36 years would pass before a resident Catholic priest was installed. Headquarters for the Mackenzie River Catholic missions had been situated about 350 km upstream at the Sacred Heart Mission in Fort Providence, from which point successive travelling missionaries were despatched to serve the region. In 1894, this mission was moved to Fort Simpson, which had become a more important settlement and where the evangelizing efforts of the Catholic Church showed great promise. As the missionary activity of both churches spread throughout the Mackenzie District and Arctic regions, the Catholic Church achieved greater success in the upper reaches of the Mackenzie River and in the Great Slave Lake area. The Anglican Church dominated the lower Mackenzie and Delta area, the Arctic coast and much of the interior of the northern Yukon.

The native peoples indigenous to the southwestern region of the Northwest Territories were the South Slavey, ancestors of today's local Dene (Deh Cho First Nations). As the fur trade and freight forwarding business flourished during the Victorian era, many Métis were drawn to Fort Simpson to find employment. For generations, the Métis formed the largest demographic group at Simpson. Changing economic conditions ultimately forced many to abandon the town and, by the 1950s, the Dene people again made up the majority of the local population. The signing of Treaty 11 in 1921 gave the Dene status as "treaty Indians" and benefits the government promised would flow. However, land claims would not be resolved for several generations. Schooling for native children became the formal responsibility of the Indian Affairs Department, which soon provided more support for church run day and residential schools.

Métis children received little government support for education until the 1950s. At Fort Simpson, most were baptized Catholics who attended the St. Margaret's Mission Day School. A few, who were orphaned or destitute or who received the sanction of the Indian Agent, were sent to the Fort Providence Catholic Indian Residential School (1867-1953) or the Anglican St. Peter's Residential School at Hay River (1900-1936), although the latter school was in the Treaty 8 area. After its opening in 1936, All Saints Residential School at Aklavik accepted some native Anglican children from Simpson.

After World War II, Ottawa embarked on a program of establishing centralized federal day schools in major communities throughout the Territories and western Arctic. Most were in place by 1952. The classroom blocks at the church run residential schools were then phased out. The first permanent federal day school at Fort Simpson opened in 1955 with separate wings for Anglican and Catholic students. It was replaced in 1960 by the large secular Thomas Simpson Day School, a completely government owned and managed facility.

Children from the more remote settlements in the Territories and those from migrating families continued have difficulty accessing schools. In 1955, the government announced plans for several large student residences to be constructed adjacent to many of the new federal schools. These hostels were expected to be open by the end of the decade. Funding came primarily from Ottawa, with a smaller contribution from the NWT, and each facility was to be managed by either the Anglican or Catholic Church under contract.

In 1960, two hostels opened at Fort Simpson—the Anglican run Bompas Hall (named after Bishop William C. Bompas) with capacity for 50 students and the Catholic Lapointe Hall (named after Mother Superior Marie-Adeline Lapointe, founder of the first orphanage and school at Fort Providence) with capacity of 150. Bompas Hall was operated by the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC), through its agency, the Indian School Administration. Ultimate federal responsibility for the hos-

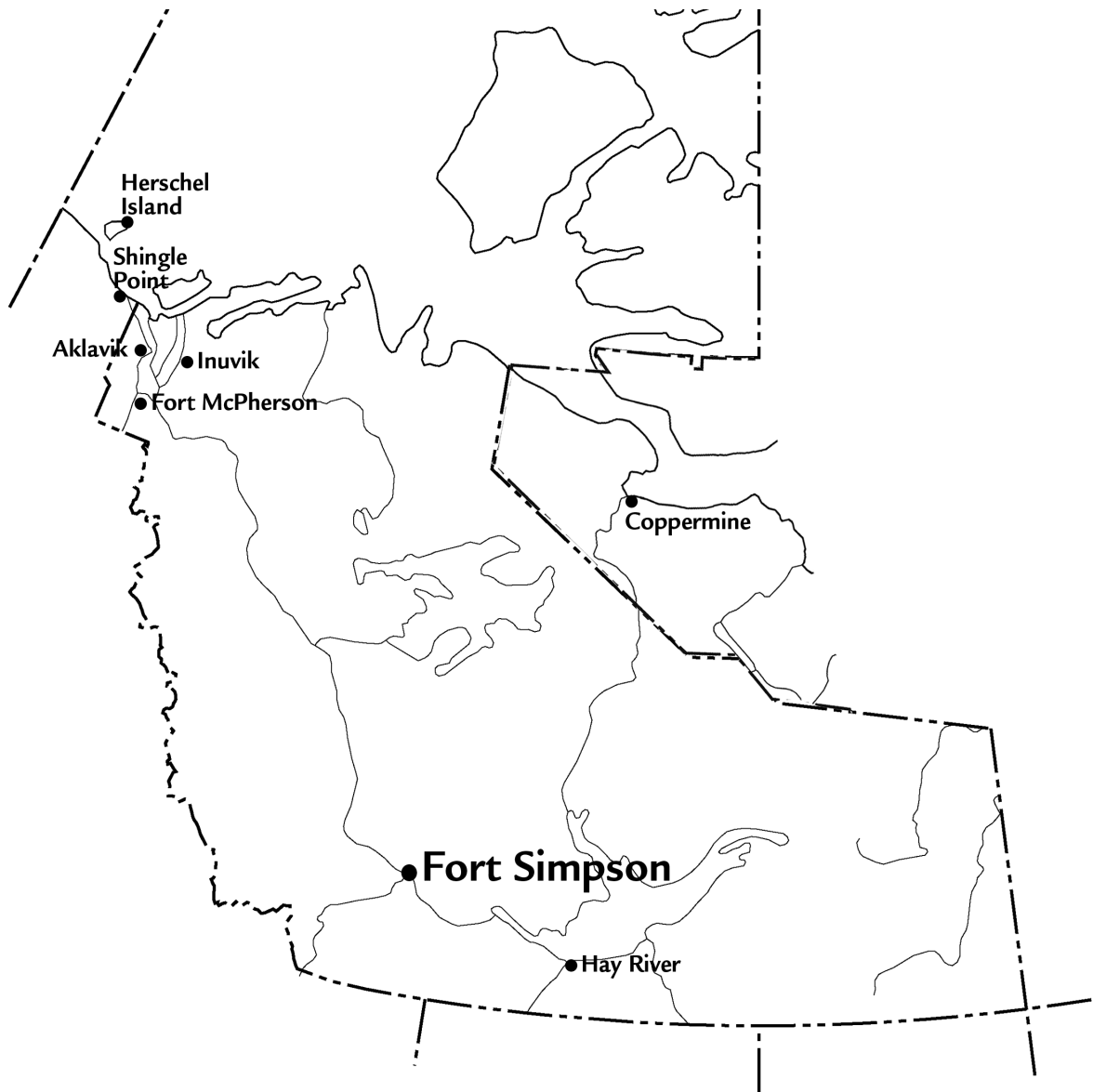
tels resided with the federal Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. Ottawa paid the per capita cost of native (treaty Indian) children enrolled and the Territorial government paid for Métis, Inuvialuit and white children. Normally, eligible boarders had to be children from families residing outside Fort Simpson for two thirds of the year.

Upon opening, Bompas Hall had difficulty in registering a full compliment of Anglican students. The average enrolment in the first year was 17 and at times staff outnumbered the children. This was to be a chronic problem, partially solved in later years by transferring students from other crowded Anglican hostels such as Stringer Hall at Inuvik. By 1962, some children hailed from such far away places as Hay River in the south and Cambridge Bay in the high Arctic. Inuit children soon formed the largest segment of hostel residents. Church administration of Bompas Hall ended in 1969 when responsibility was transferred to the Department of Education of the Northwest Territories.

Milestones

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| 1858 | St. David's Anglican Mission established; first church built in 1861. |
| 1894 | Catholic Sacred Heart Mission relocates from Fort Providence to Fort Simpson where this Church will find the most adherents in the generations that follow. |
| 1921 | Local Dene bands sign Treaty 11, assuring government support of residential and day schools for treaty children, most of whom attend local day schools run by Anglican and Catholic missions. Some Anglican native children, especially orphans, are sent to Anglican boarding schools at Hay River (closed 1936) and at Aklavik (1936-1960). |
| 1955 | Denominational federal day school opens with separate classrooms for Anglican and Catholic students. |
| 1960 | Thomas Simpson secular federal day school opens, replacing former denominational school. School takes in local children of all ethnicities and those boarding at the Anglican Bompas Hall and Catholic Lapointe Hall. |
| 1960 Oct. | Anglican run Bompas Hall opens with enrolment of less than half its 50-pupil capacity. Catholic Lapointe Hall also opens, with capacity for 150. |
| 1965 Fall | Bompas Hall reaches capacity with 52 children in residence—32 Inuit, 19 Dene and Métis and 1 white student. |

1969 April 1 Anglican administration of Bompas Hall is transferred to the Territorial Government.



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