



# The Mohawk Institute

Brantford, ON

In pre-Confederation times, there were few Anglican residential schools for Canada's native children. These schools, usually affiliated with Church missions, existed with the sanction of the colonial government or permission of the Hudson's Bay Company, whose large land holdings (Rupert's Land) in the west were home to many schools. The main Anglican Church and its constituent dioceses were generally not in a financial position to operate boarding schools and welcomed the involvement of its independent missionary societies.

For the Mohawk Institute, the benefactor was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and the Parts Adjacent in America, usually known as The New England Company (NEC). The NEC later supported one other Anglican boarding school in Canada—St. George's Industrial School, which opened in 1902 at Lytton, BC.

The Mohawk Institute was the oldest continuously operated Anglican residential school in Canada. It was established in 1828 as the Mechanics' Institute, a day school for native boys from the Six Nations Reserve at present day Brantford, Ontario. Three years later, the school took in boarders and girls were later admitted in 1834—this date usually taken as the founding of the residential school. In later years, pupils were drawn from other reserves, such as neighbouring New Credit and more distant Moraviantown, Sarnia, Walpole Island, Muncey, Scugog, Stoney Point, Saugeen, Bay of Quinte and Caughnawaga. In the twentieth century, increasing numbers of orphaned and destitute children were enrolled.

The Six Nations Reserve has a rich and complicated history. Ancestors of many of its Iroquoian peoples came from the Mohawk Valley in New York State where they had been allies of the British during the American Revolutionary War. Facing the loss of their homes in America following the end of hostilities (Treaty of Paris, 1783), a grateful King George III granted them land in the soon to be established (1791) Province of Upper Canada. The Haldimand Tract (so-named for the Governor of Quebec who was a former British commander) was conveyed to the Six Nations in 1784. This large parcel of 385,000 hectares straddled the Grand River, 10 km on each side, from its source near Dundalk, Ontario, to its outflow at Lake Erie. In later years, this land grant would be substantially reduced by colonial decree and through contested agreements with the Canadian government. As well, smaller portions were sold off by band leaders, under questionable circumstances. The disposition of the Six Nations lands has remained controversial to this day.

The first occupants of the Grand River Six Nations were a group of Mohawks led by Joseph Brant ("Thayendanegea"). By 1788, they had established a village of 400 near an important crossing point on the river, soon to be known as Brant's Ford. The Mohawk Village soon prospered, as it was situated on the main Indian trail between the Detroit and Niagara Rivers. The Six Nations Reserve was formally created January 14, 1793.

Many of the Mohawks were Anglicans who had previously worshipped at Fort Hunter, New York, where a chapel was built by the Crown during the reign of Queen Anne. It was abandoned by the Mohawks during the American Revolution. Chief Joseph Brant petitioned the Crown for a replacement chapel at the new Mohawk Village in Canada and this wish was acceded to in 1785 with the construction of St. Paul's Chapel. It was given its "Royal" designation by Edward VII in 1904. Today, it is the oldest surviving church in Ontario and the only Royal Chapel in North America.



The Mohawks on the Grand were soon joined by the other Six Nations peoples—the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Tuscarora nations. Together, they comprised the most populous Indian reserve in Canada, mostly evangelized, and soon to be administered to by an Anglican mission and school, funded in part by the Crown. The adjacent New Credit Reserve (created out of former Six Nations lands) was home to the Mississauga Nation who were served by Methodist (United Church) missionaries, following their relocation from former settlements along the Credit River west of Toronto.

Once established in 1831, residential schooling on the Six Nations Reserve would experience many challenges in the generations that followed—need for expansion, funding, relocation, reconstruction after fires, changing curricula, partnering with government and, ultimately, the school's *raison d'être*.

## Milestones

- 1828 Mechanics' Institute opens as a manual training day school in the Mohawk Village for Indian boys from Six Nations. School is located across the road from the Royal Chapel of the Mohawks on land granted to the NEC by the Colonial Government and Six Nations Chiefs.
- 1831 Some schoolboys are boarded at the Institute or in the Village.
- 1834 Dormitories added to provide residential quarters for ten boys and four girls.
- ca. 1837 Due to influx of non-native settlers, Provincial Government of Upper Canada orders Six Nations people to vacate land north of the Grand River (including the Mohawk Village) and to resettle on land south of the river, several kilometres from the school and chapel. Relocation is completed by early 1840s.
- 1840 School remains in its original location at for-

mer Mohawk Village and is expanded to take in 40 children, mostly boarders, and especially more girls. A waiting list exists through the 1840s.

- 1854–1859 School destroyed by fire and new building with subsequent additions erected a few hundred metres from old location. This site would be the final location of the school for more than a century.
- 1860 NEC acquires large farm and vocational training soon focuses on farming which becomes a profitable venture by the mid-1870s. School adopts the more familiar name, Mohawk Institute.
- 1868 Enrolment increases to 90.
- 1880s Some students attend Brantford Collegiate Institute as a means to qualify as teachers. By the mid-1890s, about 20 boys and 25 girls had become Indian school teachers at the Mohawk Institute and other residential schools.
- 1885 Government makes one time operating grant when school begins to accept students from other reserves.
- 1891 Start of annual per capita grants by government to assist NEC in operation of the school until 1922, when Indian Affairs Department assumes management.
- 1894 Orphans and destitute children taken in, some non-native. Large 3-storey wing added. Amendment to Indian Act makes education compulsory for native children.
- 1903 Main school building and barns are destroyed by fires set by students.
- 1904 Replacement building opens in October with authorized pupilage of 125. This structure, with later additions, will survive until it is closed in 1971. A small hospital is added to the school complex in 1908.
- 1922 Following earlier attempt by NEC to sell the school to Indian Affairs, a 21-year lease is agreed to instead. Government takes over school operation and NEC reduces most of its financial assistance. Building receives major renovation. Agreement requires principal to be an Anglican, nominated by NEC. Another attempt to sell school in 1930 is unsuccessful. Indian and Eskimo School Administration of MSCC, which is poised to take over most Anglican residential schools in 1923, loses interest in managing the Mohawk Institute when financial issues cannot be resolved with NEC and government.

1934 New dormitories added, increasing school enrolment to 150.

1946, Jan. 1 New 21-year lease takes effect, continuing the status quo arrangement between NEC and government. However, NEC is unable to continue providing modest financial support.

1948-1958 Classrooms added by renovating former army building moved to site and constructing new classroom block.

1955 Enrolment is 185 students.

1960s School evolves into a hostel, providing accommodation for children requiring special care and attention and for those from distant reserves lacking Indian day schools. Many attend Brantford public schools, as space permits. Enrolment declines as Children's Aid Societies find foster homes for many of the Institute's children.

1963 Farming is discontinued as the boys are in school all day and hired labour deemed too expensive. Farmland will be returned to local Indian band.

1965 New England Company sells its interest in the school building to the government for \$100,000.

1969 April 1 Government assumes complete control of school.

1970 June 30 School closes. Most of the children in residence are from the north where new day schools have been constructed at their reserves. Only 23 students from Six Nations are in attendance this final year. By agreement with Six Nations Council, the government keeps a small staff to care for few remaining children kept in the hostel until foster care can be provided. School is finally vacated March 31, 1971 and building offered to Six Nations. Remaining school lands—a large part NEC claims title to—is ultimately returned to the Reserve.

1972 October Native run Woodland Cultural Centre opens at the former school site. Old building is renovated for administrative offices and a research centre and new museum is constructed adjacent to it. The museum is dedicated to the history and culture of the Iroquoian and Algonkian peoples and offers gallery space for special art and historical exhibitions.



Compiled by General Synod Archives, September 23, 2008.



GENERAL SYNOD OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA  
80 Hayden St., Toronto, ON, M4Y 3G2

For further information, contact the General Synod Archives at  
archives@national.anglican.ca or (416) 924-9199, ext. 279