



St. Andrew's School

Whitefish Lake, AB

In late Victorian times, Anglican missionary activity in the Lesser Slave Lake area of northern Alberta focused on three communities—St. Peter's at Lesser Slave Lake Settlement (1877), St. Andrew's at Whitefish Lake (1892) and St. John's at Wabasca (1894). All missions were founded through the efforts of the second Bishop of Athabasca, the Rt. Rev. Richard Young, who received support from the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Residential schools were soon established at these mission posts to serve native children in the local settlements, primarily those of the mixed blood Métis and smaller numbers of Cree, Chipewyan and Beaver peoples. Dr. Young and his successor, Bishop George Holmes, were always cognisant of the evangelizing efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, which had missions close by and whose local adherents always outnumbered those attracted to the Anglican fold.

St. Andrew's Mission was situated about 50 km north of Lesser Slave Lake, on the east side of Little Whitefish Lake (Lake Atikamisis or Lake Utikumasis) adjacent to the Hudson's Bay post and community known later as Atikameg. Five km to the east was the larger Whitefish Lake (Lake Utikuma). Atikameg is the Cree word for whitefish, common to these waters.

Most of the area's Indian bands signed on to Treaty 8 on June 21, 1899, but some near Whitefish Lake did not sign adhesions until 1907. The large Métis population was divided and apprehensive over the implications of Treaty 8 and many in this group declared themselves as native in order to gain the status of "treaty Indian." For the treaty commissioners it was often a subjective task when accepting or denying each applicant's stated background. Both main churches also exerted their influence over the signing parties. The Catholic Church encouraged mixed-blood natives to accept scrip payments (one-time vouchers for cash or land) and not treaty rights, so that these Métis children would not be eligible to attend residential schools run by the Anglicans. Most Métis and their ancestors who had migrated to Whitefish Lake had been evangelized in the Catholic faith. Anglican missionaries saw their success in serving those mixed-blood natives who elected to be status Indian and whose children would be more likely to attend St. Andrew's Mission School, under the direction of the local Indian Agent.

As events unfolded in the following decades, most children enrolled at the Anglican Whitefish Lake School were non-treaty Métis, whose parents were usually destitute. As well, the native population on the newly created reserves (source of authorized pupils) declined in the early years due to widespread disease outbreaks. In 1903, the St. Andrew's Mission School opened with an enrolment of ten boarders, who were billeted temporarily at the mission house. Three years later a new building was completed with accommodation for 17 residential students. Initially, the government recognized the school as serving day students but in 1908 provided per capita grants as a sufficient number of treaty children from local reserves were attending as boarders.

The grant formula was detailed in an agreement signed between the Diocese of Athabasca and the government in 1911. However, exceptions to the rule were normal as Métis children continued to be enrolled, sometimes with Indian Affairs sanction but often not. Treaty children were always given priority. Funding for unauthorized children was borne by the Church.

In 1923, operation of St. Andrew's Indian Residential School was transferred from the CMS to the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC), whose agency the Indian and Eskimo School Commission had taken over most of the other similar Anglican schools in Canada. MSCC found the three schools in the Lesser Slave area—St. Andrew's at Whitefish Lake, St. Peter's at Grouard and St.



John's at Wabasca—to be small, outdated and in need of replacement or amalgamation. The government proposed to combine all schools at a central location at Lesser Slave Lake (St. Peter's site). However, the Bishop of Athabasca was not receptive to the idea, fearing children formerly attending the closed schools would be registered in the surviving Catholic schools closer to their communities.

St. Peter's School closed in 1932 and students were transferred to the Whitefish Lake School, which was promised additional government funding for this expected rise in enrolment. As well, a new influx of Métis arose in 1938 with the creation of the large Gift Lake Métis Settlement, which bordered on the Anglican and Catholic Missions at Little Whitefish Lake. This was the first such legal homeland for Métis people in Canada and served as a major catchment area for children attending the local St. Andrew's Residential School and St. Bernard's Catholic boarding school at Grouard.

In 1950, the government and Church agreed that St. Andrew's School should be closed, due to the poor condition of the buildings. Indian Affairs constructed a day school in 1949 at the Roman Catholic Mission in Atikameg and, a year later, opened the Bishop Sovereign Indian Day School, which was Anglican administered. Church involvement ended in 1969 when the government assumed complete control of all jointly run day schools in the Lesser Slave Lake region and elsewhere in Canada. Operation of the Sovereign Day School was soon turned over to the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council.

Milestones

- 1892 St. Andrew's Mission established at Little Whitefish (Atikamisis) Lake in the Diocese of Athabasca, 430 km north of Edmonton.
- 1899, 1907 Treaty 8 and adhesions are signed by native population in northern Alberta, including bands in Whitefish Lake area. Many local part-native (Métis) groups elect to be "status" Indian to enjoy treaty rights and government promise to enrol their children in residential or day schools.
- 1903 St. Andrew's School opens with enrolment of 10 boarders temporarily housed in mission house.
- 1906 New dormitory building constructed with capacity for 17 students. Most students (Métis) are not authorized by government.
- 1907 School receives limited funding when classified as day school by government.
- 1908 Government provides per capita grant in recognition of sufficient number of authorized boarders enrolled at school.
- 1911 Operating agreement signed between Indian Affairs and Diocese of Athabasca outlining funding formula, standards for enrolment and

	Church's obligation to maintain facilities and provide staff.	1950	Residential school closes in June and is replaced by new government-built day school, which opens in September and is administered by the Indian School Administration of MSCC. Bishop Sovereign Indian Day School is formal name adopted in January 1951.
1923	Indian and Eskimo School Commission of MSCC takes over operation of St. Andrew's Indian Residential School from Church Missionary Society.		
1932 June 30	St. Peter's Indian Residential School at Lesser Slave Lake Settlement (Grouard) closes and students transfer to St. Andrew's at Whitefish Lake for commencement of fall term.	1969 April 1	Ottawa assumes control of Sovereign Day School and subsequently (1975) transfers operation of the school to the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Council.



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