

# “Each has a house of her own”: Purpose, Domesticity and Agency of First Nations Women in Canada’s Industrial School System, 1883-1923

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Industrial schools for Aboriginal peoples<sup>1</sup> of the Canadian Northwest were first seriously debated in Canada’s House of Commons in 1883. After learning the proposed sum of the cost for building the schools, leader of the Liberal opposition Mr. Edward Blake asked his colleagues what the general purpose and goals were for the system and whether females would be required to attend. When Sir Hector Langevin, M.P., responded that the schools were intended for male children with their principal instruction being the cultivation of soil, Blake responded with a justification for the education of First Nations women: “[i]f the hon. gentleman is going to leave the young Indian girl who is to mature into a squaw to have the uncivilized habits of the tribe, the Indian, when he marries... will likely be pulled into Indian savagery with her.”<sup>2</sup> This argument apparently carried weight. From the 1830s to the 1990s, as part of an attempt to assimilate and “civilize” First Nations peoples into the dominant Euro-Canadian society, young Aboriginal women across Canada were sent to schools away from their families, homes and nations to learn how to become “proper” wives, mothers and homemakers.

In an attempt to better understand the reasons behind and the impact of enrolling female students in the schools, this study analyzes one era and regional focus of the industrial school system—the Canadian Prairies from 1883 when the first industrial schools were established in the west, until 1923, when industrial schools were merged with boarding schools into a newly-designed “residential school” system.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the focus will be the first three industrial schools created, which laid the foundation for the system in the west (including British Columbia): the High River Industrial School<sup>4</sup> in what is now Alberta; and the Qu’Appelle Industrial School and the Battleford Industrial School in Saskatchewan.

Two leading questions have shaped this study. First, this paper interrogates the various churches’ and government’s goals for female students in the industrial schools of western Canada. This study argues that the Canadian federal government’s and various churches’ goals for the female students were twofold. Initially the purpose of education for the female student was to create “proper” wives for the male students who would stand in place of the “non-educated” and “unassimilated” First Nations females who would

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper the terms “Aboriginal” or “Native” will be utilized when referring to the Indigenous peoples of Canada. There are some instances when terms such as “squaw” or “Indian” appear, but this will be as a result of contemporary labels of Indigenous peoples in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>2</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> session, vol. 14 (1883), 22 May 1883: 1377.

<sup>3</sup> John S. Milloy, *“A National Crime”: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 52.

<sup>4</sup> High River is also called St. Joseph’s Industrial School and Dunbow Industrial School.

otherwise, according to officials of the institutions, pull male graduates back into a life of "savagery." As time progressed, however, the methods of educating female students changed. Female students, with support from the government and the churches, took on the role of domestic servants both inside and out of the school as part of the "outing system." Administrators intended such positions to be temporary as the primary goal remained that female graduates would marry and conform to gender ideals of the era.

Second, this study examines the "success"<sup>5</sup> of the schools based on their projected outcomes and argues that the system was ineffective. Female students prevented the federal government and various churches from achieving their goals of making "proper" housewives through the industrial school system. Many women kept their traditions after graduation by returning to their families and nations, and through activities such as leaving graduate colonies to attend traditional activities such as the Sun Dance. Still others did not conform to Victorian ideals of womanhood when they became "breadwinners" through their work in domestic service. While administrators encouraged this as a temporary position, many women continued to pursue such positions after graduation, much to the chagrin of the majority of administrators. This demonstration of agency, however, does not mitigate the impact of the colonialist polices of church and state.<sup>6</sup>

This study concludes that while government and church administrators believed that the schools would teach female Aboriginal students how to conform to ideals of white, Victorian womanhood and would help advance the cause of "civilizing" male students, in the end, female students faced many difficult conditions in the schools and had other goals in mind such as utilizing the skills they learned to find employment outside of the home, the opposite of the gender ideal that administrators envisioned.

The introduction of Native industrial schools was an important aspect in the history of westward expansion and colonization by Euro-Canadians. In his National Policy, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald envisioned a country from "sea to sea." The west in this vision would be populated by immigrants and would serve as a source of resources for central Canada, which would be the hub of industry.<sup>7</sup> This desire to populate the west with non-Native "settlers," along with the declining health and well-being of First Nations peoples, led to significant changes that involved government intervention in the form of the creation of schools for Aboriginal peoples. No longer needed as military and economic allies, Native peoples were seen as a "problem" that could be solved by training them to be self-sufficient and subservient, though as lower class citizens who would engage in manual labour.<sup>8</sup>

Before the creation of schools in the west, however, similar manual-labour or "industrial" institutions already existed in central Canada in the 1830s and in Upper Canada in the 1840s. These schools were founded by churches whose main purpose was to convert

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<sup>5</sup> Here the term "success" refers to the view of church and government officials. For Aboriginal peoples, of course, the goals for the schools and what they saw as a success would often vary a great deal from that of administrators.

<sup>6</sup> See Robin Brownlie and Mary-Ellen Kelm, "Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?" *Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (1994): 543-556.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Craig Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> See Noel Dyck, *What is the Indian "Problem": tutelage and resistance in Canadian Indian administration* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1991).

Native children to Christianity and train them to adopt strategies of manual labour to become self-sufficient. In these early years these schools were primarily funded by groups such as the New England Company and managed by missionaries. Male students learned farming, blacksmithing, tailoring and carpentry, while female students learned arts such as spinning, knitting, sewing and housekeeping.<sup>9</sup>

Given the situation of hunger facing Aboriginal peoples in the Prairies in the 1880s, First Nations leaders hoped the Canadian school system could be of benefit to them, though not to assimilate. The agreement to provide schools to First Nations peoples of the numbered treaties in the west was initially suggested and insisted upon by First Nations negotiators and then subsequently agreed to by the Queen's representatives who signed the treaties.<sup>10</sup> As a result, an education clause was inserted in each of the seven treaties signed in the 1870s. At negotiations, "both the Crown and First Nations made reference to the fact that education would be for the future prosperity of First Nations."<sup>11</sup> However, education for future gain on their own terms was not what Native peoples of western Canada received. As detailed by Nicolas Flood Davin whose report was important to the establishment of industrial schools in the Canadian west, the government had its own goals for the schools—the subjugation and assimilation of Canada's Native peoples.<sup>12</sup>

These schools were created to augment and/or replace the already existing day schools. Administrators disliked day schools because they did not prevent students from being exposed to their families and communities whose Indigenous culture eroded the government's "civilization" program. Senior cabinet minister Hector Langevin stated in an 1883 Parliament session that "[t]he fact is, that if you wish to educate these children you must separate them from their parents during the time they are being educated. If you leave them in the family they may know how to read or write, but they still remain savages, whereby separating them in the way proposed, they acquire the habits and tastes... of civilized people."<sup>13</sup> Likewise, boarding schools were not seen as particularly useful because students were not learning sufficient skills to support themselves, thus the government needed to continue to spend funds to support them after graduation. Industrial schools then, became the centerpiece of Canada's assimilation policy.

By the 1920s, there were more female students attending industrial schools than male students.<sup>14</sup> A possible explanation for parents' acceptance of sending their daughters to school and their reluctance to send their sons may have been due to the fact that the "industrial training" that was required of the students also fit traditional Aboriginal notions of what was "proper" for women. According to Jacqueline Gresko, "Indian parents and

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<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Pettit, "'To Christianize and Civilize': Native Industrial Schools in Canada," (Ph.D. diss., University of Calgary, 1997), 22-25.

<sup>10</sup> Treaty Seven Elders and Tribal Council et al, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 119-120.

<sup>11</sup> See Sheila Carr-Stewart, "A Treaty Right to Education," *Canadian Journal of Education* 26, no. 2 (2001): 129.

<sup>12</sup> As discussed in Nicholas Flood Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*, 14 March 1879, [hereafter *Davin Report*], Library and Archives Canada, Record Group 10 [hereafter RG], Volume [hereafter Vol.] 6001, File 1-1-1.

<sup>13</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> session, vol. 14 (1883), 22 May 1883: 1376.

<sup>14</sup> LAC, *Boissevain Recorder*, 9 Jan 1922, RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 2, School Files, 532. .

children enjoyed some aspects of Industrial School programs that were not too much at variance with traditional patterns of life – plentiful housework for girls, musical instruments and fancy uniforms for boys in the brass band."<sup>15</sup>

Even though reasons existed for Native peoples to want their female children attending the schools, and although Davin had implied that women would be a part of the industrial school system in the Canadian west (as was the case in the schools he visited in central Canada and the United States), female attendance at the schools was not originally part of the plan of the government. In his report Davin mentioned that "[a]t the industrial school, in addition to the elements of an English education, the boys are instructed in cattle-raising and agriculture; the girls in sewing, breadmaking, and other employments suitable for a farmer's wife."<sup>16</sup> The parliamentary session in May of 1883 proved that the federal government, despite the Davin report, had other intentions since they explained that the original plan was to develop the schools for male students only. As a result of disappearing buffalo and the influx of immigrants challenging traditional ways of living, the schools were supposed to teach Aboriginal male students new skills which would make them self-supporting (and in the process would save the government money as they would no longer have to provide rations). This training would take the form of instruction in trade and farming techniques.<sup>17</sup> However, as the parliamentary session had demonstrated, it was soon recognized that the importance of training First Nations women to become good wives was also of utmost importance. A year later, in 1884, the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, John A. Macdonald, wrote to the Governor General outlining the original goals of the three new schools founded in the west. He reported that

[t]he original proposal was that these institutions should be devoted exclusively to the education of Indian boys; but it would be a proper subject for the consideration of Parliament at its ensuing Session, whether a sufficient amount should not be voted to admit of the buildings being enlarged, and a staff of female teachers employed for the education and industrial training of Indian girls; the same being, in my opinion, of as much importance as a factor in the civilization and advancement of the Indian race.<sup>18</sup>

Contained in this message is evidence of the Canadian government's goal to "civilize" and "advance" the First Nations peoples of the Northwest through education. Significantly, Macdonald proclaimed that the education of girls was essential to this goal. It was the general idea of the Prime Minister and the rest of the federal government that First Nations women as mothers and wives would exert a strong influence on male school graduates and their children. They thought that if the girls were not educated, then the boys would eventually fall back into what the government and church believed were "bad habits" once

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<sup>15</sup> Jacqueline Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School: 'White Rites' for the Indians of the Old North West," (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1970), 178.

<sup>16</sup> *Davin Report*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 218.

<sup>18</sup> *Annual Report of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada* [hereafter *Annual Report*], 1884, xi.

they were married.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Father Hugonnard of the Qu'Appelle Industrial School stated, "[a] school for girls was absolutely necessary to effect the civilization of the next generation of Indians."<sup>20</sup> The Prime Minister similarly believed if Native male graduates married uneducated Native females that "either they themselves would relapse into savagery, or the progeny from those marriages following example and teaching of the mother will not improbably adopt the life and habits of the pure Indian."<sup>21</sup> They also believed that without a proper Christian education, the Aboriginal women would never learn piety and virtue.<sup>22</sup>

From the beginning, both Qu'Appelle and High River Industrial Schools opted to enrol female students. The Grey Sisters from Montreal who were hired to be matrons and cooks for the schools would aid in this endeavour. An annual report from 1884 reported, "the Battleford School is not taking any girls for the present, mainly owing to lack of accommodation, while the other two [Qu'Appelle and High River] are authorized to take ten or twelve. These latter will be happily taken care of by the several nuns connected with the two establishments."<sup>23</sup> When Superintendent General of Indian Affairs and Prime Minister John A. Macdonald saw how easily the education of girls could be integrated into the schools, he quickly advocated for the establishment of female teachers and female education in the Battleford School.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, despite the original goal to not include First Nations women in the industrial schools, they eventually became an integral part of the entire school system. An article in the *Boissevain Recorder* in 1922 reported that of the 12,558 Native children attending Native schools throughout the Dominion, the larger portion of the students were girls.<sup>25</sup> The number of female students rose so quickly that extra funding was required, making the school system much more expensive to operate. Given the perceived influence of females on male graduates though, government and church officials believed female attendance was mandatory or else they would corrupt male graduates.<sup>26</sup>

This view was due to the negative images and stereotypes that labelled Aboriginal women as "incongruous, corrupting and demoralizing."<sup>27</sup> The government used these

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<sup>19</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> session, vol. 14 (1883), 22 May 1883: 1377.

*Annual Report*, 1885, 138. Principal Hugonnard wrote, "A school for Indian girls would be of great importance, and, I may say, would be absolutely necessary to effect the civilization of the next generation of Indians. If the women were educated it would almost be a guarantee that their children would be educated also and brought up Christians, with no danger of their following the awful existence that many of them ignorantly live now. It will be nearly futile to educate the boys and leave the girls uneducated."

<sup>20</sup> Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School", 174,

<sup>21</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 219.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> *Annual Report*, 1884, 161.

<sup>24</sup> *Annual Report*, 1884, xi.

<sup>25</sup> LAC, *Boissevain Recorder*, 9 Jan 1922, RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 2, School Files, 532.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 124.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1993): 155. See also Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

stereotypes to blame Aboriginal women for the impoverished conditions on the reserves. In her article, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," Sarah Carter explains that "[r]esponsibility for a host of other problems, including the deplorable state of housing on reserves, the lack of clothing and footwear, and the high mortality rate was placed upon the supposed cultural traits and temperament of Aboriginal women."<sup>28</sup> These images and stereotypes became so embedded that they played a major role in government policy for schools. Carter explains,

[t]he beautiful 'Indian Princess' who saved or aided white men while remaining aloof and virtuous in woodland paradise was the positive side of the image. Her opposite, the squalid and immoral 'Squaw,' lived in a shack at the edge of town, and her physical removal or destruction can be understood as necessary to the progress of civilization.'<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, an annual report submitted from the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs in 1899 claimed that "[m]ortality among infants continues to be excessive, and is doubtless attributable mainly to two causes, viz: the early age at which mere girls assume the responsibility of matrimony, and the utterly unsuitable food they give their infants."<sup>30</sup>

To add to the image of being unfit mothers and housekeepers, First Nations women were accused of being immoral due to "wanton" behaviour. In 1880, the *Toronto Globe* reported that Aboriginal women had "loose morals" and that "no men in the world are so good as to teach them better, or try to reform them in this respect."<sup>31</sup> According to Carter they were "identified as the cause of vice and corruption in the new settlements of the prairie west."<sup>32</sup> Jean Barman, author of "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," states that all over the world Indigenous women presented an enormous dilemma to colonizers, "at the heart of which lay their sexuality."<sup>33</sup> Since Aboriginal women were traditionally able to make their own choices in regards to their sexual decisions, they were further pushed into the category of "savage."<sup>34</sup> This was in marked contrast to Victorian ideals for women.

Industrial and residential schools were considered by many to be the answer to these imagined problems of First Nations women. It was believed that the schools would train women in domestic science and public health through indoctrination of Euro-Canadian ideals and practices and would decrease their sexual proclivities.<sup>35</sup> The schools would also remove women from the harmful effects of their mothers' and grandmothers'

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<sup>28</sup> Carter, "Categories of Exclusion", 148.

<sup>29</sup> Carter, "Categories of Exclusion", 148.

<sup>30</sup> *Annual Report*, 1899, xx.

<sup>31</sup> Carter, "Categories of Exclusion", 153.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, "Categories of Exclusion", 154.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies* no. 115/116 (Winter 1997/98): 239.

<sup>34</sup> Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality", 241.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 217-230.

<sup>36</sup> Mary-ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia 1900-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 62.

care and influence.<sup>36</sup> An article published in the *Saskatoon Herald* on 1 January 1890 stressed the "progress" of female students at the Battleford School in this regard:

[m]ore marked even than in the boys is the improvement noticeable in the girls. To one who does not know the appearance they presented when first removed from the squalor and wretchedness of their native homes the change is incredible. Clean smart looking and well dressed, they give promise of the great possibilities in store for them in the future, when they become the heads of Christian households instead of remaining the slaves and drudges of the Indian camp. Besides the learning they acquire in the school room they are taught the arts of good housekeeping, and how to perform the thousand and one duties that make the well ordered white family and it is most satisfactory in their work and display a far greater aptitude in learning than was expected at the beginning of the experiment.<sup>37</sup>

These goals for the female students reflect the contemporary visions of the ideal woman in this era, largely shaped by factors such as industrialization, the growth and appearance of a "middle class" and the ideals of marriage and patriarchy.<sup>38</sup> Women were seen as the main influence of their households and their children. As historian Barbara Welter has argued, ideal women at this time were expected to demonstrate four cardinal values: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. She asserted that Christian religion was promoted because it did not take a woman away from the "proper sphere" of her home (a place separate, of course, from the public sphere of men). For young women though, purity was just as important as piety. Women were expected to practice chastity until marriage and those who went against this were considered "member[s] of a lower order."<sup>39</sup> Equally significant, a woman was expected to be submissive and to focus her whole attention on her husband while attending to what was perhaps the most important part of her role, domesticity.<sup>40</sup> Administrators were confident that industrial schools would meet all four goals—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Piety and domesticity were integral parts of the duties expected of the girls in schools, and purity and submissiveness would develop from being exposed to the "proper roles" for women.

In the industrial schools, every day for the female students was predictable. This focus on routine was seen as important not only to instill European concepts of time, but also to prepare male students in particular for the routine work that was part of the newly emerging industrial economy. Mary John described her average day in Lejac industrial school:

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Julian Wasylow, "History of Battleford Industrial School for Indians." (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1972), 94-95.

<sup>38</sup> See Cynthia R. Commachio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (1996): 154.

<sup>40</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

[e]xcept for Sunday, our routine was always the same. I would tumble out of bed early in the morning and wash in a hurry. When my bed was made, I ran to chapel and attended Mass. It seemed to go on forever, but when it was done, it was time to go the girls' side of the dining room for a plate of porridge... After breakfast there were chores – sometimes it was clearing the table or sweeping or dusting. When our chores were done, it was time for class. The afternoon was just like the morning. Lunch was a plate of boiled barley or beans and a thick slice of bread spread with lard. The only time we had butter on our bread was on a feast day. After lunch we had chores and class again. The afternoon finished with a swing or singing lesson. At seven-thirty in the evening, there was Benediction in the chapel, and at eight-thirty, in total silence, the students went to their dormitories, said their prayers and fell into bed.<sup>41</sup>

Much of a female student's day then, was taken up with training and chores.

While male students engaged in industrial training that was particularly well defined, female students had training that was rather generalized and not necessarily intended to impart skills in a specific trade. Instead, schools focused on teaching skills that the federal government and churches believed to be required of a wife and mother. As Miller states, "[t]he gender difference in assignment of labour was itself grounded in different perceptions and experiences of male and female behaviour and attitude."<sup>42</sup> Hence, male and female students had different experiences in the schools when it came to training and chores. Likewise, female students had far fewer recreational activities available to them. While boys engaged in activities such as various sports and military training, girls were relegated to activities such as sewing and embroidery, domestic pursuits in keeping with notions of gender ideals.<sup>43</sup>

For both groups, educational training and chores were often considered to be the same thing. Both male and female students spent the vast majority of their time working rather than taking part in classroom activities. For example, at the High River School in 1887 girls would spend the entire morning sewing. This involved mending, repairing or making the clothing for the students of the school, as well as a wide range of other items. In 1891 alone, the girls at the High River School were responsible for making "ninety-one pairs of trowsers [sic], eighty-four coats, fifty-one aprons, thirty-seven dresses, ninety-six shirts, eleven chemises, sixty night dresses, thirty-six pairs mitts, sixty pairs socks, fifty-eight pairs stockings, forty-eight towels, twenty-five garters, thirteen mattresses, eleven pillows, sixteen pairs of drawers, fourteen petticoats, two blouses and two cassocks."<sup>44</sup> Afternoons at the High River School were taken up with cooking. Similarly, at the Qu'Appelle School girls were in charge of poultry and dairy, whereas at Battleford School female students were in charge of baking.<sup>45</sup> Inspector T.P Wadsworth commented with pride that the sisters at Qu'Appelle could be absent from the school for the entire day,

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<sup>41</sup> As cited in, Pettit, "'To Christianize and Civilize', 235-236.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 223.

<sup>43</sup> See Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, Chapter 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Annual Report*, 1891, 112.

<sup>45</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 150.



leaving the girls to take care of the school's household duties as well as manage the preparation of all the meals for the staff and students.<sup>46</sup> Girls also served as housemaids in all of the schools. As an 1889 report from the Battleford School outlined, "[t]hey learn to sew and knit by hand, as well as to work the machines, and do all repairs necessary to clothing. They also wash all dishes and take the places of housemaid, [and] second seamstress..."<sup>47</sup> Given the sheer size of the schools and the number of students in attendance, this was no small task.<sup>48</sup> Government officials though, were very pleased with the focus on domestic work and images of female students engaged in domestic pursuits could often be found in annual reports of the department (see Figure One).



Figure One  
*Students Engaged in Domestic Work, 1891*<sup>49</sup>

Whatever their ability and their task, it is clear that it was the job of the students to sustain the schools in order to save money. As mentioned previously, not long after opening the three schools were forced to rely on per capita government grants, but these grants were too small to allow for the majority of the cooking, cleaning or other household activities to be performed by someone other than the female students. Principal Hugonnard of Qu'Appelle School explained in his 1894 annual report: "[t]he change made at the commencement of the present fiscal year, from the old system, under which the government purchased everything to the present per capita system under which the management has to do the purchasing, has entailed a consider amount of extra work..."<sup>50</sup> Principal Naessens of High River School similarly complained that "[t]he main feature of this year's happenings is the bringing of the management of the school under the per capita

<sup>46</sup> *Annual Report*, 1893, 177.

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report*, 1889, 89.

<sup>48</sup> In 1889 Battleford had 17 girls in attendance (*Annual Report*, 1889, 88) and High River had 15 girls in attendance (*Annual Report*, 1889, 89)

<sup>49</sup> Photograph of female students in "sewing room" at the High River Industrial School. All appear to be to be operating diligently in their small work space. Source: *Glenbow Archives*, NA-2459-3.

<sup>50</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 196.

grant system. The outcome has been a deficit in the financial standing, thus proving that the grant was too small...."<sup>51</sup> Thus the amount of physical labour increased in order to maintain the schools. Mary Augusta Tappage explained work that she did to support the activities of the male students: "[w]e had to patch the boys' clothes. We had to wash and iron Mondays; Tuesday. We had to patch and keep on patching till Saturday and all their bags would be lined up."<sup>52</sup> An annual assessment done on the schools in 1891 demonstrated how important it was to the government for this to keep happening. The report, written by E Dewdney, outlined the work of the girls: "[t]he instructresses in tailoring, dressmaking, the manufacture of shirts and under-clothing, mending and knitting, and the girls under them, direct their efforts towards meeting the requirements in those lines of their respective institutions."<sup>53</sup>

School administrators argued that the chores the female students did in order to sustain the school were all part of the domestic training required to turn the girls into efficient and "proper" housewives. Yet, as Pettit points out, "[h]uge industrial schools had little in common with the typical Native household. Cooking for 200 was of course very different than preparing meals for one's own family."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, a visitor at Qu'Appelle School in 1893 reported that students made hundreds of meals: "[t]he meals upon this day were served with their usual promptness, and were as well cooked as usual, while the housework went on without any apparent break. This was no small feat for Indian girls to accomplish, considering that some six hundred meals were provided during that one day."<sup>55</sup> It is clear from these numbers that while the schools claimed to want to produce wives for male graduates, the interior and exterior of the buildings and workspaces bore little resemblance to the typical Aboriginal household on the reserves.

From the outset the "outing system" was utilized at the Battleford, High River and Qu'Appelle schools. In the outing system, students would work outside the schools in non-Native environments such as local farms and households to improve their training. The system would bring the schools money, and while they were away, the students did not need to be clothed or fed. This placement in manual labour, subservient positions was in keeping with the government's larger goal of the subjugation of Native peoples. The churches and government believed the system would improve the students' English, and that the non-Native environment would teach them by example how to live "civilly."<sup>56</sup> For female students this meant domestic work typically in non-Aboriginal homes either as servants or nannies. The outing system was more popular for female students and was thought to be of more benefit than for male students because they would have more opportunities to learn English and they would be "isolated from their own people."<sup>57</sup> In 1892 Qu'Appelle School had 18 girls working in neighbouring settlements. This outnumbered the boys, demonstrating that that the girls were in high demand.<sup>58</sup> An 1894 report described the principal's satisfaction with the system: "[t]he girls hired out continue

<sup>51</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 196.

<sup>52</sup> As cited in, Jennifer Pettit, "'To Christianize and Civilize', 238.

<sup>53</sup> *Annual Report*, 1891, xi.

<sup>54</sup> Pettit, "'To Christianize and Civilize", 246.

<sup>55</sup> *Annual Report*, 1893, 177.

<sup>56</sup> Pettit, "'To Christianize and Civilize", 248.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 255.

<sup>58</sup> *Annual Report*, 1892, 53.

to give good satisfaction and I have more demands than I can fill. The girls receive from five to ten dollars per month. Lately one had her wages increased from six dollars to ten dollars a month, without having made any application for the increase. The other pupils had ten dollars per month each, which is as much as the best white servant girls receive."<sup>59</sup> Many non-Native people made use of this system including the wives of principals and even Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed who in 1889 had "a little girl" from Battleford School.<sup>60</sup> Initially this plan was to "solve the servant girl problem in the west until such time as they were married to young men graduates."<sup>61</sup>

Despite the intense concern for the separation and segregation of male and female students while they were in school, government and church officials believed the ideal situation would be for male and female graduates to marry each other. Therefore, marriage among pupils was not only encouraged, but also sometimes arranged in time for graduation. For instance, in 1900 the principal of High River School married two students by the name of Percy Steele and Eliza Montcalm.<sup>62</sup> Another marriage took place at Qu'Appelle School in 1894. The principal reported that,

[t]he two married together were pupils Nos. 34 and 0125, the former was an excellent carpenter and was supplied with a set of tools; he is a full-blooded Indian, is a good worker, is adhering to the habits of civilization taught him here; and since leaving the school... His wife is a first-class needlewoman and house-keeper, has been in service for some time and bears an excellent character.<sup>63</sup>

Even after marriage, however, female graduates were kept under surveillance. For example, a report by Inspector Alex McGibbon in 1894 observed, "As I have noticed in a previous report, the houses where I found girls who had been attending St. Joseph's [High River] Industrial School were the neatest and cleanest kept, proving that the excellent training that the girls receive at the school is turned to good account."<sup>64</sup> This was not always the case and often administrators voiced their concerns about reserves.

It became evident to school officials that graduates were returning to their communities after release from school and were continuing "habits" that they held before their "education" at the institutions. School officials also noticed that the graduates were not as educated as they had hoped. An agent from the Kainai reserve in Alberta, for example, remarked in 1903 that "[a]ny lad who has never left the reserve, is at the age 18, far better off than a lad who has been in the school for years, and what is more is very much self-reliant and able to make a living as easy again as many of these school lads."<sup>65</sup> To address this, in 1901 the department established a colony in File Hills that was far away from the students' traditional reserves. The students would have farms of their own on

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<sup>59</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 195.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 253-55.

<sup>61</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 255.

<sup>62</sup> Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 229.

<sup>63</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 193

<sup>64</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 113.

<sup>65</sup> Milloy, *A National Crime*, 159.

eighty-acre lots.<sup>66</sup> However, it was found later that the lots were not big enough and some ex-pupils worked on two hundred and three hundred acre lots.<sup>67</sup> A farming instructor and an Indian agent supervised the reserve colony that was to be populated with students from Qu'Appelle and other industrial schools in the area.<sup>68</sup> A report by Inspector W. M. Graham of the colony in 1910 explained that "[m]ost of the young men of this colony are married to girl graduates of the schools, and, in many cases, these young women make good housewives, although there are a few who require constant supervision."<sup>69</sup> Before long the colony was viewed as a disappointment in the eyes of the government. Some of the ex-students were reported to be "lazy and indifferent" and were said to "require constant supervision and urging to keep them at work."<sup>70</sup>

Likewise, administrators were also dissatisfied with graduates in general; it appeared the industrial schools had not lived up to expectations. Reports showing the majority of discharged pupils from Battleford and Qu'Appelle demonstrate that the "success" of female graduates was often measured by whether they were married and/or good housekeepers. While some of the girls were described as "good housekeepers and workers," and "like a white girl in every way," many of the female students had either left the schools before graduation, died, or returned back to their reserves to live according to their family's traditions. Deserters were often labelled "imbecil[s]" or "incapable of education."<sup>71</sup>

Thus, while church and government officials envisioned a system that produced female graduates who lived up to the ideals of Victorian womanhood, this was not the case. Many students resisted acculturation attempts by participating in traditional activities such as the Sun Dance after graduation.<sup>72</sup> A letter from Principal Hugonnard of Qu'Appelle School dated 23 November, 1903 stated that "[u]ndoubtedly a number of those who have graduated from these schools hitherto have wasted their education, and too many have relapsed into Indian and pagan habits notwithstanding Government officials on the reserves, and the earnest endeavours of the missionaries labouring amongst them."<sup>73</sup> Moreover, rather than being submissive wives of male graduates, many of the female students who graduated lived independently or became the main breadwinners for their families by working outside the home as domestic servants. There were a number of reasons for this. First of all, as Gresko explains, traditional gender roles for Aboriginal men were very different from the Euro-Canadian gender roles to which the male students were taught to conform. For instance, in traditional homes men would often raise ponies, but seldom farmed, which some men saw as "women's work."<sup>74</sup> Plus, those men who were willing to farm often found themselves stymied by the peasant farming policy of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Annual Report*, 1904, 177.

<sup>67</sup> *Annual Report*, 1910, 416.

<sup>68</sup> Milloy, *A National Crime*, 159.

<sup>69</sup> *Annual Report*, 1910, 417.

<sup>70</sup> *Annual Report*, 1911, 83.

<sup>71</sup> *Annual Report*, 1893, 95-97; *Annual Report*, 1893, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School", 184.

<sup>73</sup> Father Hugonnard, as cited in Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School", 201.

<sup>74</sup> Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School", 183- 184.

Canadian government which prevented many from succeeding.<sup>75</sup> Instead, in many Aboriginal households, "hard cash came from hauling freight, selling firewood, harvesting for white farmers, and especially from the work of women as domestics for settlers."<sup>76</sup> Mary Angus, former student of Battleford, explained her intentions to leave the school early and get a job in domestic service,

I shouldn't be leaving the school until I was 18. I used to go and ask Mr. Cook and Mr. Matheson to let me go. I wanted to go since I stayed long enough. He said I should learn more. I asked him if I could leave and he asked me what I was going to do. I told him I would work out and earn my own living. That's what I told him. I used to work for Bob Speers, the milkman in South Battleford. I did housework. I worked for Mrs. Storey who live behind the Hudson Bay Store and for an old man, Mr. Dunbar. He was an old timer, I was about 17 when I started to work.<sup>77</sup>

While officials frowned on this, Katherine Hughes of the "Association for Befriending Indian School Graduates" was an advocate for finding such employment for industrial school students upon graduation. Hughes stated that the graduates of the schools were in such high demand that they could "practically choose their own places at good wages."<sup>78</sup> She continued to say, "a few of the most capable and cheerful and healthy should be thoroughly trained as nurses and then joined to the Victorian order sent back to help their people."<sup>79</sup> Other female students pursued teaching or administrative work. In 1892, a female graduate of the High River School by the name of Jos Callikoo was reported to have "engaged herself" as a servant for Indian Agent DeCases and then shortly after graduation she received a job as a teacher at a day school at a place called Bear's Hill.<sup>80</sup> Significantly, some of the female graduates became self-sufficient despite not marrying. A report from Qu'Appelle School in 1894, for example, explained how three of the girls took jobs as housekeepers and had been in service for over a year. The principal even added that "[e]ach has a house of her own."<sup>81</sup>

The idea to include female students in the Native industrial schools of the Canadian west was an afterthought of the government. Once the decision was made, the intention of church and state officials was to educate and train Native women to meet the ideals of Victorian womanhood in order to prevent male students from relapsing into

<sup>75</sup> Sarah Carter, "Two Acres and a Cow: 'Peasant' Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889-97," *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (1989): 27-52.

<sup>76</sup> Gresko, "Qu'Appelle Industrial School", 184.

<sup>77</sup> Mary Angus as cited in Wasylow, "History of Battleford Industrial School for Indians," 450.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Katherine Hughes on behalf of The Association for Befriending Indian School Graduates to D. Falconio, Apostolica Delegate, 15 Sept 1901, page 7, LAC, RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 1, School files, 349.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Katherine Hughes on behalf of The Association for Befriending Indian School Graduates to D. Falconio, Apostolica Delegate, 15 Sept 1901, page 7, LAC, RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 1, School files, 349.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Katherine Hughes on behalf of The Association for Befriending Indian School Graduates to D. Falconio, Apostolica Delegate, 15 Sept 1901, page 7, LAC, RG 10, Volume 6001, File 1-1-1, part 1, School files, 349.

<sup>81</sup> *Annual Report*, 1894, 194.

"savagery" after their "education" in the industrial schools. Through day-to-day life, curriculum, chores, and dress, the Canadian federal government and various churches pushed the girls to conform to an ideal that was different than their Native traditions. Female students refused to embrace these terms and resisted the system in many ways, not the least of which was to permanently take up domestic work outside the home.

It is difficult to imagine the thoughts and feelings of the girls and women who attended these industrial schools established in the Canadian west, but students like Julia, number 17 at the Qu'Appelle Industrial School, who was described as "[d]eserted; unfit for school: now married and redeeming her character," or Isabella Constant, number 8 at the Battleford Industrial School, described as "[l]eft to go as servant to Indian Commissioner," decided to respond to industrial schools as best they could given power relations. In the end, the majority of female students, within the colonial framework, made choices for themselves based on their own needs and desires, rather than conforming to the gender ideals for women propagated by church and government officials.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Annual Report*, 1893, 95-97; *Annual Report*, 1893, 103.

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