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‘Forced to Work ‘Too Hard’: A Case Study of Forced Child Labour and Slavery in Manitoba’s Indian Residential Schools

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CONTENT WARNING

Some of the information, content, and language in this article may be difficult, triggering, and/or offensive. Where such content is included, it is used because it is important to understanding the history and context of the topic. The appearance of such content in this document in no way implies its acceptability, nor does it endorse any sentiments expressed in such language.

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If you or anyone you know is experiencing difficulty related to this topic or the information in this article, help is available 24 hours a day through the [Indian Residential School Survivors Society Crisis Line](#), 1-866-925-4419.

People able and interested in supporting work associated with addressing the history of residential schooling might consider donating to the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#).

The authors would also like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Annie Bunting for her feedback.^[1]



Ten years ago, Dr. Niigaan Sinclair asked his French, non-Native grandmother if she had ever heard of Residential Schools. She was born in 1920, and grew up in The Pas, Manitoba. MacKay Residential School was located approximately 10 kilometres northwest of The Pas, operating from 1914 to 1933, when it was destroyed by a fire. “No,” she told him, “but every year, young Indian girls would come door-to-door selling clothes and mitts they had sewn while in school. I remember because they were my age.”

In its landmark final report, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) noted that “The ‘half-day system’, which meant students worked for half the day, and which [officials] believed would render the system self-supporting, came close to turning the schools into child labour camps.”^[2]

As this case study focused on Manitoba reveals, unfree, forced child and slave labour were foundational, not coincidental, to the IRS system. Moreover, this labour, which can be traced back to the earliest roots of the Residential Schools system, which was consistent with definitions established by the 1926 League of Nations’ *Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery*, the 1930 International Labour Organization’s *Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour*, and the 1956 United Nations’ *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*,^[3] continued into the 1950s and 1960s.

From 2010-2012, the International Research Network on the Legal Parameters of Slavery carried out extensive research to clarify the legal definition of slavery. In this process, the researchers determined that the 1926 League of Nations’ definition

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of slavery is critical to understanding what constitutes slavery. It reads: “Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.”^[4] As Jean Allain explains in his edited book, *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, to determine whether a situation meets these standards, one should

... start by looking at the more serious of the offences and ask whether any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised in a given situation; if so, then slavery is present. In a case where one is making a decision between slavery and forced labour and slavery is not present, then one would look to the International Labour Organization’s 1930 Forced Labour Convention, which establishes that “the term ‘forced or compulsory labour’ shall mean all work or service that is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” If it can be demonstrated that in the case at hand a person has been compelled to work under a menace of a penalty and that they did not offer themselves voluntarily, then this will, in law, constitute forced labour.^[5]

Although IRS unfree labour practices predated these twentieth century definitions, at a minimum, cases involving the unfree labour of IRS pupils after 1926 and 1930 met the definitional threshold of forced child labour. At worst, as can be seen from the examples below, labour practices that underwrote the IRS system met the definitional threshold of slavery. Specifically, read against “The Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery”^[6], Residential School administrators, under the auspices of the federal government and various Churches, exercised one or more “powers attaching to the right of ownership” as well as “possession,” which “supposes control over a person by another” and may manifest as ways “to restrict free movement or access to state authorities or legal processes; or equally in attempts to forge a new identity through compelling a new religion, language, place of residence, or forcing marriage. Fundamentally, where such control operates, it will significantly deprive that person of his or her individual liberty for a period of time which is, for that person, indeterminate.”^[7]

Specific examples of powers attaching to the right of ownership clearly demonstrated by parties involved in the operation of Residential Schools include: “Using a Person,” “Managing the Use of a Person,” and “Profiting from the Use of a Person.”^[8] With respect to “Using a Person,” *The Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines* clarify that this “may include the derived benefit from the services or

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labour of that person. In such cases, a person might be used by working for little or no pay, utilised for sexual gratification, or used by providing a service.”^[9]

As evidenced in the stories of students who attended IRS in Manitoba that follow, unfree labour, forced child labour, and slavery, practices commonly framed as “educational training,” were foundational and central to the Residential School system operated by the Canadian government and churches. As such, the schools, whose operations were often positioned as acts of benevolence, were neither that, nor did they fulfill the Crown’s Treaty obligation to provide Indigenous people in Treaty with an education, the other reason given for their creation and ongoing operation.

In her 2001 article “A Treaty Right to Education,” Sheila Carr-Stewart writes that “the First Nation representatives who negotiated the numbered treaties had an understanding of formal education and expected their members and future generations to benefit from such services.”^[10] However, as Carr-Stewart points out, “The Crown,” in its subsequent delivery of education to Indigenous students, “did not fulfil its constitutional obligations and, from the outset, chose to provide limited educational services not as a treaty right, but as an assimilationist mechanism through its own criteria, the *Indian Act*.”^[11] A closer look at the use of unfree student labour at Residential Schools that operated in Manitoba from the late 1800s, practices that persisted through the 1950s and into the 1960s and met the legal parameters for slavery as defined in 1926 and forced labour as defined in 1930 under international law, expands on this discussion, showing that these schools failed to fulfil the treaty right to education; offering insights into how the schools used unfree, forced, and/or slave labour as a way of paying for the operations of the Residential School system during this period.

In the context of the IRS, unfree, slave, and forced child labour operated as a source of funding, both in the case of the sale of student-produced food, livestock, clothing, and other articles of manufacture, and in terms of cost savings where student labour produced the food, sewed the clothing, and mended the buildings that formed the schools’ campuses, or where students were sent out via the “Outing System” to work for local farmers or families who would then be responsible for keeping the students fed and sheltered.^[12] As Carr-Stewart notes, ultimately, this system failed to meet the expectations of Indigenous signatories to the Treaties because the education provided was not what communities and parents expected when they joined into Treaty. The use of their children and their children’s unfree, slave, and forced labour to fund the establishment and operation of the schools compounds this failure.

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The use of unfree student labour, which met the international standards set for slave labour as of 1926 and forced child labour as of 1930, encoded in the IRS system as “self-sufficiency,” was not accidental, nor was it a local idiosyncrasy of some schools. Indeed, this labour at the schools was an integral part their organization, and could even be a part of the plan for a school before its opening. For example, in 1888, when the Reverend E.F. Wilson of the [Shingwauk and Wawanosh Homes](#) (Residential School) at Sault St. Marie, Ontario, was preparing to open a branch school at [Elkhorn Manitoba](#), his plans included sending several Shingwauk students to the new school site. Explaining this, Wilson wrote to Indian Affairs that

I purpose taking the following Indian children from my Homes here to become temporary pupils at our new Institution at Elkhorn. They understand English well & being accustomed to the rules & regulations of an Institution will I believe have a beneficial effect on the new pupils... as well as relieving the Lady Superintendent who is to take charge of a good deal of trouble.^[13]

By sending these students west, Wilson hoped that they would work as recruiters, provide interpretation services, and help with their carpentry and other skills to prepare the school for more students. By 1897, the Elkhorn school boasted that it operated not only a farm, but four trade shops, including a print shop where “The whole of the mechanical work about the paper is performed by the boys, from the original type-setting to the proof-correcting, while the junior boys” ran off *The Elkhorn Advocate*, a local eight-page, six-column paper. In addition to this work, the six boys working in the print shop did “job-work”, which was “becoming considerable in quantity and of the most varied nature, in fact no order is refused, and the work turned out reflects great credit on both the boys and their foreman.” In the boot shop, eight children were responsible for manufacturing all of the students’ footwear, while taking in orders from “many well-known people in the West,” for a wide range of products including “riding-boots, shooting boots, Russia and patent leather shoes and ladies’ footwear of every description.” The five boys who worked at tailoring made and repaired “all the boys’ clothes,” while “building an extensive custom trade,” in fact, “orders” were “now received for garments of every description.”^[14]

The carpenter shop at the school was staffed by ten boys assigned tasks ranging from building and cabinet-making through “all branches of the wheelwright’s art,” and included “repairing of every description.” At the same time, a number of students were working in local towns, their keep provided by their employers,

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including two students who were working for the local blacksmith, and two who were working for the local tinsmith. Two more students were working for the local harness-makers, while others worked for farmers in the area. Girls were tasked with “knitting, sewing and dressmaking at the hands of a competent dressmaker,” when they were not performing “all the necessary household work,” through the course of which they were “thoroughly taught the cooking and laundry work.”^[15]

With the school’s trades shops staffed by Indigenous unfree student labour, it is perhaps little surprise that the publisher of the newspaper the *Virten Advance*, D.J. Benham, became alarmed when he heard that the school was considering relocating to the Virten area. “There is not room for two papers, and it is really a matter of a short time where one must close,” he told the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Hayter Reed, in a letter dated 6 March, 1896. “The introduction of more competition, especially of the kind in connection with one that has no wages to pay,” would mean that Benham would be driven out of the market. “I have worked hard for a foundation,” he told Reed; he did not feel it reasonable that he should then face “competition that is supported out of public revenue,” despite already having identified the subsidy unfree student labour represented.^[16]

The 1899 school admissions and discharge form for the [Brandon Industrial School](#) showed that both nine-year-old Willie Thomas, and 15-year-old John Sinclair died, in June of that year, of “fatigue” at the school. Thomas died after eleven months and four days at the school; Sinclair died after a mere ten months and twelve days there.^[17] From its opening, children bound for the Brandon school had been examined by the school’s physician before being accepted. “The admitting physician, Dr. Fraser, passed all the children except one,” wrote Brandon principal John Semmens of the first group of students he had brought to the school in 1895. Looking at school admission forms, health researcher Paul Hackett has shown that a pattern of declining health after admission to Residential Schools was all too common throughout the system’s history.^[18] “During the year four pupils have died. With the exception of an outbreak of scarlet fever, from which two of the deaths occurred, the general health of the children has been good. The drainage system is not working well, and is in great need of immediate attention,” wrote Brandon principal Thompson Ferrier in his annual report for the year ending June 1899.^[19]

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Garden boys harvesting cabbages under the watchful eye of their instructor, Brandon Indian School farm. Brandon, Manitoba, 1902. UCCA, 1993.049P/1362N.

In government and denominational publications, reports, and records, the impact of the use of unfree student labour, which met the standards for slave labour as of 1926 and forced child labour as of 1930, on classroom time, and therefore the education of students, was often represented as educational, hands-on training. This framing side-stepped the fact that the staff hired to oversee this work, which included functions such as farming, gardening, and laundry work, rarely had any training in education, and that the work they did was rarely organized around educationally sound practices.

“Only a few girls are kept at the boys’ school for the purpose of helping the reverend Sisters in the household duties and attending an evening class for school work,” observed Inspector of Roman

Catholic Industrial Schools J.A. Betournay writing about the St. Boniface Residential School in 1892.^[20] In 1900, the *Indian Affairs Annual Reports* for that year outlined the laborious domestic work, framed as education, expected from girls attending the school. “The girls are well instructed in all branches of plain sewing, as making new clothes, repairing the old ones, darning and knitting,” wrote the school’s principal, J.B. Dorais. “All their clothes are made by their own hands, and also most of those worn by the boys. They are also taught household work, scrubbing, dusting and general cleaning, cooking, baking, dairy and laundry work.”^[21]

Reporting on the [Birtle School](#) in 1938, school inspector John Sigvaldason noted that the students spent “half the day” working in the laundry, kitchen, and sewing room, “this training is in practice,” the inspector noted, adding that “Such instruction as they receive is, I believe, incidental.”^[22] In 1943, while misidentifying the use of unfree student labour that, in fact, constituted forced child labour and slavery under the international standards of the time, as a temporary measure brought on by wartime labour shortages and not as the ongoing practice that it was,

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school inspector Eldon Simms wrote in his report on the [Portage la Prairie Residential School](#) that the students at the school spent a large amount of their day working at jobs “which should rightly be done by hired help.” “The girls are employed largely in scrubbing and the boys in farm chores and I question the value of this as educational training. True, some of the girls are given cooking and sewing instruction,” he reported, but “I would like to see shop work training for the boys and home-making for the girls on a full half-day basis under qualified instructors.”^[23] In his October 30, 1945 report Simms laid out the distinction between education, and this problematic forced/slave labour that might coincidentally result in students learning some skill(s), writing that “more stress...should be laid on instructional processes and less on utilitarian work.”^[24] In 1946, Simms wrote that outside of half day classroom activities, students were “being used balance of time chiefly to perform work around institution. I question value of latter activities.... sufficient staff [should be] hired to look after institutional needs, thus freeing pupils for regular training under qualified instructors.”^[25]

Parents, too, understood the difference between unpaid forced labour and education. Writing on behalf of the Pine Creek Band in 1923, Frank Flatfoot told the Department of Indian Affairs that “it is the request of the Pine Creek Band of Indians that at the investigation, to be held concerning matters in connection with this Reserve, the question of the conducting of the above named Boarding School be enquired into. At the present time but little time is spent in teaching the Indian children reading, writing, and arithmetic.” The problem, noted Flatfoot, was that “Instead of this being done the children are employed as labourers the major part of the time on the farm of the Roman Catholic Priest who is in charge of the boarding school. It is not the desire of the children’s parents that the children be so employed,” he wrote.^[26]



Image 2: Students cleaning up in the kitchen, Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, 1959. UCCA, 1986.158P/54.

Because of the ways in which financial reporting was framed by both the schools and the government, it can be difficult to compare the contribution unfree, slave,

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and forced student labour made to the Residential School project with the amounts provided through other sources of support such as the financial operating grants made by Indian Affairs. Reports, such as a 1922 inspection report for the [Fort Alexander Residential School](#) acknowledge the importance of unfree pupil labour in general terms, writing that “the farming and gardening operations of the Fort Alexander Indian School, are conducted on a fairly extensive scale, the results contribute very largely to the successful administration and upkeep of the institution,” following this with an accounting of how many bushels of grain and produce the school had harvested in the year. The value of this produce and the unfree labour of these children and youth, however, was rarely reported in dollars and cents the way that operating grants were.

Indeed, published financial statements such as those found in the *Indian Affairs Annual Reports* frequently reported expenses while omitting income, including income from farm sales. Goods and services consumed by the schools were rarely valued at all. While, for a brief period in the early twentieth century, a few reports did itemize farm and stock sales as income, these reports rarely quantified contributions such as the cleaning, repair work, and cooking that also relied on unfree, slave, and/or forced student labour.^[27]

In 1934, the principal of the [Norway House Residential School](#) wrote to Indian Affairs complaining that the department had discharged a number of over-age pupils without his asking for their discharges. The students, all apparently eighteen years old, were still at the school two years after the school leaving age of sixteen. The department’s decision to discharge the students had led to the school having to hire from outside. “Up to sixteen the pupils (sic) is not able to be of any very marked assistance with the regular work of the school except for lighter tasks,” wrote W.W. Shoup. “During the years from sixteen to eighteen we find the pupils are able to carry our heavier tasks and so take the place of help that would have to be hired from the outside. The present financial condition of our schools will not allow the engagement of much outside help on current wages.” The department reversed its decision, allowing the students to be kept at the school until they were nineteen, despite having a stated policy that students over sixteen were to be discharged.^[28]

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Image 3: Female students baking bread, Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School. Manitoba, circa 1950. UCCA, 1986.158P/61.

Occasionally, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the contribution unfree student labour made to a school in dollars and cents. In 1950, when such labour had met the legal threshold of slavery and forced child labour for well over two decades, the Brandon Residential School realized \$8,601.67 from the sale of its farm and garden produce and cattle. This profit, which depended heavily on the forced/slave labour of students represented roughly 17% of the value of the \$49,987.43 grant provided by Canada

for the operation of the school. But the total value of student labour was even more significant than this; the \$8,601.67 realized from sales did not include the estimated value of produce consumed, which, in 1951 was \$8,890.00, while an estimated \$5,245.10 in grain and garden produce remained on hand at the school as of December 1951.^[29]

In its 1951 “Report of the Special Homme [sic] Mission Committee,” the “Brandon Presbytery on the Indian Residential School, Brandon,” reacted to the news that, under Indian Affairs reorganization plans, the pupilage of the Brandon and Portage la Prairie IRS’s would be combined. The older students would be sent to the Portage school, the younger ones to Brandon. “The removal of the senior pupils has taken away those who did a great deal of the work on the farm, in the kitchen and elsewhere in the main building. This has led to a rather serious labor situation,” wrote the Presbytery. Without student labour, the school’s farming operations had to be shut down. “The boys are no longer available for field work on the large farm and the girls are not available for the necessary household duties,” they noted, arguing that “It would seem therefore that there should be an immediate increase in the per capita grant to balance up with the cost of living and the loss of earning power removed from the school with the lowering of the effective age of pupils from around eighteen years to about 15 years or less.”^[30]

The importance of unfree forced child labour and slavery in upholding and maintaining the IRS system is also visible in the instances when it was contested and taken away by IRS pupils themselves, such as Sam Ross. Ross’ testimony to the TRC about his experiences at the Birtle IRS contributes to a deeper understanding of how unfree child labour, which, in his case, clearly met the already established

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international legal parameters of slavery, was experienced by those forced to carry it out in the guise of educational training.

In the late 1950s, Ross pushed back against the principal of Birtle Residential School in Manitoba, where, upon his arrival, he had been “put to work doing chores in the school barn.” As he recounted, “I didn’t come here for, to work with animals.”^[31] Ross was then reassigned to the boiler room which also entailed, as he noted, “a lot of work.” Ultimately, “He became proficient at working in the boiler room, but found it exhausting and asked to be sent home. When the principal refused to let him go, Ross, who was eighteen years old, made up his mind to run away,” writes the TRC.^[32]

Recall that according to the Bellagio-Harvard guidelines, “Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.” Ross’s case meets three of these powers – “Using a Person,” “Managing a Person,” and “Profiting from the Use of the Person,” which, in turn, “indicate the presence of control of a person tantamount to possession”.^[33] Ross’ testimony about the problematic half-day system drew the attention of officials, as the TRC notes in its final report:

After Sam Ross ran away from the Birtle school in 1959, he told Indian Affairs official J. R. Bell that he wanted to continue his education, but had been forced to work “too hard” at the Birtle school. He said that from September to Christmas of the previous year, he had worked in the school barn every day between “6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. and from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 [a].m. again at recess, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. and had had to stoke up the furnace with coal at 10:00 o’clock before retiring.” Ross said “he liked school but not working like a hired hand.” He had been first in his Grade Nine class at Christmas with an average of 78.8. Bell recommended that the amount of student labour being done at the Birtle school should be investigated.[34]

Sam Ross’ case was not the first time that an IRS pupil at Birtle Residential School sounded the alarm over having been “forced to work ‘too hard’”. In October of 1959, Fred Nasecapow “said that he had run away because he had not gone ‘to school to become a farm hand.’”^[35]

Approximately 90 miles away and 23 years earlier, in 1936, Kenneth Thompson had run away from Brandon Residential School to escape being overworked. He informed police “I am a Treaty Indian of Assiniboine Indian Reserve, I am 17 year

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of Age. I wish to state the reason I ran away from school was because I have to work too hard in fact I do not study at all. I am working around the school all the time. I consider if I have to work I may as well work at home for my father.”^[36]

Persisting into the 1950s and 1960s, this history of depending on unfree, slave, and forced student labour to underwrite the costs of operating schools for Indigenous children was a long one that reached back to the earliest Residential Schools in Manitoba. Over a century earlier, in 1822, shortly after the arrival of John West, the first Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary to Red River, Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) London Committee Member Benjamin Harrison, who also sat on a number of Anglican missionary society boards, wrote in his report on the Red River mission and mission school that “the expense of provision for the children will on year be diminished, as the garden ground and land are broken into improved cultivation. The greater the number of children the less will be the proportional expense.”^[37]

One year later, in 1823, the HBC’s James Hargrave wrote in the Lower Red River (Winnipeg) post journal that the Company had given the Reverend John West the old HBC fort at the Forks to use for his mission and school, adding that “a portion of land immediately behind the Fort will also be enclosed as a garden the products of which, cultivated by the oldest boys, will greatly assist in the maintenance of the children it is proposed to collect.”^[38]

By the early 1830s, Indigenous people, pushing back against CMS missionary attempts to induce them to board their children at the mission school at Red River were concerned about what would happen to the children at these schools. In his 1831 letter to T. Woodroffe, the CMS missionary William Cockran reported that “If we offer to take his children to instruct them, [the Indian] thinks we only want to make slaves of them.”^[39] As the TRC writes in its Final Report, “Sam Ross was one of hundreds of residential school students who ran away.” Further, “his story has much in common with those of other students. He ran away because he was overworked,”^[40] ample evidence that the fears of potential slavery that Indigenous people raised more than a century before were much more than rhetorical.

For its own part, Indian Affairs was well aware of the fact that the half-day system was not providing students with meaningful educational training. In their 1942 Annual Report, the Department noted that “difficulty has been experienced in securing teachers with the training necessary to provide worthwhile vocational instruction for boys.”^[41] Similarly, in reference to Residential Schools in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and northwestern Ontario, in 1946 Indian Affairs official A. J.

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Doucet acknowledged that “little organized training is taking place” at the schools.^[42]

Contrary to the government and church’s stated goals of providing meaningful educational and vocational training, the TRC notes that “It is clear from the record that rather than being given training that helped them develop employable skills, students spent their half-day doing repetitive chores that helped subsidize school operations.”^[43]

In 1948, Principal D.S. Pitts of the Cecilia Jeffrey school near Kenora, a school whose catchment area included students from Manitoba, emphasized the non-educational aspects of unfree student labour that met the definitional threshold of forced child labour and/or slavery, writing that “There is a good deal of time ‘wasted’ in the very elementary ‘lesson’ of peeling 100 lbs of potatoes each morning – time that could better be used in teaching some better methods such as actual cooking.”^[44]

So too were officials aware that some students were forced to work for more than the stated half day, sparking Indian Affairs to issue formal direction for more classroom instruction. In a 1923 letter to Indian Agent William Gordon, A.S. Williams, writing on behalf of the Indian Affairs Department’s Assistant Deputy and Secretary, wrote that

I have to refer to that portion of your No. 7 A of the 2nd instant, relative to the classroom attendance at the Norway House Indian Boarding School. The Department agrees that, unless under very special circumstances, the boys and girls in residential schools should have, regularly, a half day classroom activity. At the time of harvest, or when special work is being undertaken, it may be impracticable to have the older boys in the classroom: but, generally speaking, the Department insists on 5 half days’ instruction per week.^[45]

As the 1950s drew to a close, and the Federal government directed that students should spend full days in the classroom, just as their non-Indigenous counterparts did, school farms began to close. As this happened, schools argued that the changes that full-time classroom attendance brought on called for increased funding, funding needed to make up for the loss of the value of forced student and slave labour. But even as students headed to full-time classroom education, they would continue to be forced to work at chores around the schools, and later around the student residences where they lived. The “practice is to assign chores to the boys and domestic duties to the girls. This though it be necessary in the operation of the

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institution, is not directly related to the educational activity”, acknowledged the government of Canada in a 1956 report on First Nations education.^[46]

This brief article has highlighted the longstanding history and persistence of unfree student labour that was both foundational and integral to the IRS system.

Rooted in the history of the schools, as of 1926 and 1930, these practices met the legal thresholds of slavery and forced labour established in international law. It is important that we do not lose sight of the recentness of this history and its enduring legacies. To this end, this case study of Manitoba Residential Schools contributes to addressing the incomplete record of the past, inserting this important facet of unfree, forced child and slave labour into broader understandings of the Residential School experience and the injustices experienced by Indigenous children at the hands of the churches that operated them and the Canadian government that oversaw them under the guise of educational training.

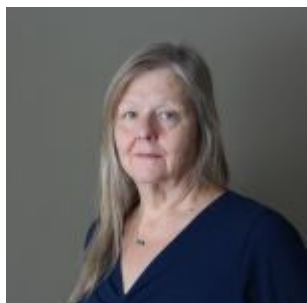
About the Author



Karlee Sapoznik Evans

Dr. Karlee Sapoznik Evans is a longstanding social justice and human rights advocate and researcher. She was named one of CBC Manitoba's Future 40 under 40 and has served as part of reconciliation, anti-slavery, genocide prevention, social justice, and human rights projects across Canada, in Sierra Leone, Mali, Peru, Italy, England, Spain, Ukraine, Israel, and the United States. From 2014-2015, she led a team of researchers for Library and Archives Canada's Document Disclosure Project for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Her research on historical and contemporary slavery, including human trafficking, helped inform Canada's Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act. From 2012-2016, she was a professor at l'Université de Saint-Boniface. Since 2016, she has worked as a civil servant, overseeing mixed-methods research and strategic policy in the best interests of children, youth, young adults, and families in Manitoba.

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Anne Lindsay

[Anne Lindsay \(she/her\)](#)'s career has focused on archival primary source research, particularly in areas relating to settler interactions with Indigenous peoples, as well as fur trade-era history. A post-doctoral fellow at the University of Winnipeg under Dr. Mary Jane McCallum, she is currently working on a research guide for families whose loved ones went away to Indian Hospitals and Sanatoria, and never returned. As well, she has worked and continues to work as a researcher for a number of Indigenous communities, including work focusing on the present implications for educational planning that stem from the colonial history of education in specific communities. In addition to this work, she has held positions in archives and research with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba and before that, with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. She is also currently involved in local dialogues around identifying unmarked burials and tracing missing children as a part of honouring Indigenous histories of Residential Schooling in Canada.



Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair is Anishinaabe (St. Peter's/Little Peguis) and an Associate Professor at the University of Manitoba, currently acting as the Head of the Department of Indigenous Studies. He is an award-winning writer, editor and activist who was named one of Monocle Magazine's "Canada's Top 20 Most Influential People" and he won the 2018 Canadian columnist of the year at the National Newspaper Awards for his bi-weekly columns in *The Winnipeg Free Press*. In 2019, Niigaan won Peace Educator of the Year from the Peace and Justice Studies Association based at Georgetown University in Washington, DC for his many roles as a public intellectual, including being a part of the "Power Panel" on CBC's *Power & Politics* and National Affairs panel on CBC's *The Current*. In his academic work, he is the co-editor of the award-winning *Manitowapow: Aboriginal Writings from the Land of Water* (Highwater Press, 2011), *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories* (Michigan State University Press, 2013) and *The Winter We Danced: the Past, the Future and the Idle No More Movement* (Arbeiter Ring Press, 2014).

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- [3] See League of Nations, *Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery*, 25 September 1926, 60 LNTS 253, available at: www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.13_slavery%20conv.pdf [accessed 19 July 2021]; International Labour Organization (ILO), *Convention Concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour*, 28 June 1930, C029, available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ForcedLabourConvention.aspx [accessed 19 July 2021]; UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*, 7 September 1956, available at www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.15_supplementary%20slaverytrade.pdf [accessed 19 July 2021].
- [4] League of Nations, *Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery*, 60 LNTS 253.
- [5] Jean Allain, ed., *The legal understanding of slavery: from the historical to the contemporary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand, 2012), 43, available at https://modernslavery.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/allain_-_contemporary_slavery_and_its_definition_in_law_proofs_0.pdf [accessed 19 July 2021].
- [6] International Research Network on the Legal Parameters of Slavery, "The Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery," 3 March 2012, available at https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/the_bellagio-harvard_guidelines_on_the_legal_parameters_of_slavery.pdf [accessed 20 July 2021].
- [7] "Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines," 16-17. That the IRS was designed and operated to perform these functions, compelling and/or coercing Indigenous people to join new religions, take on new languages, pursue off-reserve employment away from family and community, etc. has been amply demonstrated by the TRC, as well as other authors. For most of the IRS's history, Indigenous children who fell under the *Indian Act* were forced to travel to, and live at, Residential Schools. See, for instance, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 1* for more on this. On the subject of the indeterminacy of the period students were kept at the schools and expected to perform labour there, the example of the Norway House school below shows that even students who had achieved the department's stated leaving age could not count on being released.
- [8] "Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines," 17.
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Sheila Carr-Stewart, "A Treaty Right to Education," *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de L'éducation* 26, no. 2 (2001), 126.
- [11] Ibid.

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[12] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 1*, 338ff. Although some students did receive some money that was tied to their labour in some circumstances, and children working out of the schools usually received a wage, the choice to perform the labour in the first place was not always entirely voluntary. As well, the money students received could be reserved for students judged to be the “best workers,” a reward to encourage assimilation, rather than fair compensation for labour provided. And even once a student had received this money, or money from working out, Indian Affairs continued to control it. Students had to seek permission to spend their money, specifying what they wanted to spend it on.

[13] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 3924, file 116,823, E.F. Wilson, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to The Dept. Superintendent General [L. Vankoughnet] of Indian Affairs, 17 December, 1888.

[14] Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June 1897*, (Ottawa: 1897), 237-238, available at www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/first-nations/indian-affairs-annual-reports/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=11313 [accessed June 26, 2021].

[15] Ibid.

[16] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 3924, file 116,823, D.J. Benham to Hayter Reed, Esq., 6 March, 1896.

[17] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, Indian and Inuit Affairs, GRB/BAN #W84-85/402, Box/Vol #13761, file [Admission of Pupils – Brandon Industrial School], part 1, 1895 to 1933, [Quarter not specified], 1899. More research is needed on the link between strenuous labour and fatigue related deaths of residential pupils as well as the link between unfree child labour and settler colonialism. On the latter, see Alexandra Giancarlo, “Indigenous student labour and settler colonialism at Brandon Residential School,” *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* 64, no. 3 (2020): 461-474.

[18] FJ Paul Hackett, Sylvia Abonyi, and Roland F. Dyck, “Anthropometric indices of First Nations children and youth on first entry to Manitoba/Saskatchewan residential schools—1919 to 1953,” *International journal of circumpolar health* 75, no. 1 (2016): 30734; John Semmens, “Notes on personal History,” 95, available at <http://uccarchiveswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/1915-John-Semmens-Notes-on-Personal-History-UCArchivesWpg-278-d1.pdf> [accessed August 5, 2021].

[19] Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended June 30, 1899* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1900), 305, available at www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/first-nations/indian-affairs-annual-reports/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=12817 [accessed August 5, 2021].

[20] Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1891* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1892), 108, available at <https://archive.org/details/annualreportdep00affagoog/page/n159/mode/2up?q=Boniface> [accessed August 5, 2021].

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[21] Parliament of Canada, *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1900), vol. 34, session 5, 311, available at www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9_08052_34_11/633?r=0&s=1 [accessed August 5, 2021].

[22] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 8449, file 511/23-5-014, Department of Indian Affairs Inspector's Report on Birtle Indian Residential School, John P. Sigvaldason Esq., Inspector of Schools, Shoal Lake, Manitoba, to R.A. Hoey, Supt. of Welfare & Training, December 22, 1938, available at https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13800/1616?r=0&s=3 [accessed August 5, 2021].

[23] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 8449, file 511/23-5-017, Department of Indian Affairs Inspector's Report on Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, November 19, 1943, available at https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13800/1808?r=0&s=3 [accessed August 5, 2021].

[24] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 8449, file 511/23-5-017, Department of Indian Affairs Inspector's Report on Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, October 30, 1945, available at https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13800/1819?r=0&s=3 [accessed August 5, 2021].

[25] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 8449, file 511/23-5-017, Department of Indian Affairs Inspector's Report on Portage la Prairie Indian Residential School, November 18-19, 1946, available at https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13800/1827?r=0&s=3 [accessed August 6, 2021].

[26] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 6270, file 582-1 part 1, Pine Creek Boarding School, General Correspondence and (Maps), 1893-1926, Frank Flatfoot to the Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, Ont., May 26, 1923.

[27] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 8448, file 506/23-5-019, Department of Indian Affairs Inspector's Report on Fort Alexander Indian School, 13, February 16, 1922, available at https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c13800/102?r=0&s=3 [accessed August 6, 2021].

[28] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, vol. 6269, file 581-10, William Gordon, Indian Agent, Norway House, Manitoba, to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, July 3, 1934, available at www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/microform-digitization/006003-119.01-e.php?q2=2&q3=246&sqn=1874&tt=2304&PHPSESSID=v5ruuiq2vqb68kr9mcr6blv1h0 [accessed August 6, 2021].

[29] United Church of Canada Archives Winnipeg, 509/2/2-5-2, Brandon Residential School File, "Financial Statement of Brandon Indian Residential School, December 31, 1950," available at <http://uccarchiveswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/1950-Brandon-Financial-Statement-UCArchivesWpg-c99-d50.pdf> [accessed August 6, 2021]; Ibid., "Annual Report of the Brandon Indian Residential School, December 31, 1951," available at <http://uccarchiveswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/1951-Brandon-Annual-Report-UCArchivesWpg-c99-d66.pdf> [accessed August 6, 2021].

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[30] Ibid., “Report of the Special Homme Mission Committee, Brandon Presbytery, on the Indian Residential School. Brandon,” 2, available at <http://uccarchiveswinnipeg.ca/wp-content/uploads/1951-Brandon-Annual-Report-UCArchivesWpg-c99-d66.pdf> [accessed August 6, 2021].

[31] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 335.

[32] Ibid.

[33] “Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines,” 17.

[34] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 139. TRC, NRA, INAC – Resolution Sector – IRS Historical Files Collection – Ottawa, file 128/25-2- 575, volume 1, J. R. Bell to R. D. Ragan, 17 February 1959, [IRC-041312].

[35] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 140.

[36] Thompson’s statement also draws attention to the fact that the theft of labour the IRS’s practices involved directly deprived individuals, their families, and their communities of the potential benefits of that labour. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 1*, 587; Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6258, file 576-10, part 9, “Royal Canadian Mounted Police Report Re: Kenneth Thompson, Runaway Boy,” 28 October 1936.

[37] Church Missionary Society, Northwest America Mission (Rupert’s Land), Mission Books Vol. 1, Minute of Benjamin Harrison Esquire on the Point of a Mission among the Indians in the Hudson Bay Company’s Territories, 1822, “Schools,” f.2. It should be noted here, however, that, unlike the Canadian Government, the CMS was not representing this education as fulfilling any Treaty or other obligation.

[38] Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, B.235/a/5, James Hargrave, Lower Red River (Winnipeg) Post Journal, 1822-1823, f.44-45, March 13, 1823.

[39] Church Mission Society Archives, North-West America Mission Series, Mission Book 1, Rev. Wm Cockran to Rev. T Woodroffe, Red River Settlement, August 3, 1831.

[40] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 336.

[41] Ibid., 133.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid. Library and Archives Canada, RG29, volume 974, file 388-6-4, part 1, D. S. Pitts to L. B. Pett, 2 April 1948, quoted in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 133.

[45] Library and Archives Canada, RG10, Schools Files, General Administration, vol. 6268, file 581-1, part 1, Norway House, General Administration, 1898-1933, A.S. Williams for Asst. Deputy & Secretary, Ottawa, to William Gordon, Esq., Indian Agent Norway House, Man., July 13, 1923.

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[46] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2*, 139.