

SHINGWAUK
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SHINGWAUK SCHOOL

Carolyn Harrington

DURING THE 1820's the Ojibway of the St. Mary's River had been an important part of the growing Indian-white community at Sault Ste. Marie. They were successful as fishermen and hunters while their trade was courted by the many competing fur companies. Their allegiance too was courted by the British. They fought for the Queen, successfully defending their home-grounds against Yankee encroachment. In return, promises had been given

by the crown to provide homes for the people. In addition, a missionary and a school was promised to them. The bands fully expected to be included in all future plans for the area.

Shingwaukonce, father of Augustine, a wise and politically astute chief, was determined that his people would be assured an equal opportunity to share in, or perhaps even control, the development of the local economy. However, following the settlement of border hostilities with the United States, it became clear that the British were not about to honour their promises.

Shingwaukonce donned his snowshoes and marched, in the dead of winter, to Toronto where he was determined to obtain the support promised his people.



Augustine Shingwauk (pictured above with his wife): "I hope before I die to see a great teaching wigwam built at Garden River where children from the great Ojibway Lake would be received and clothed and fed and taught how to read and write and also how to farm and build homes and make clothing so that by and by they might go back and teach their own people."

Governor Colborne agreed to Shingwaukonce's requests and construction of a community began on the outskirts of the Sault where the band was living. A farmer was sent to teach agriculture and oxen were supplied to do the heavy work. A missionary arrived to Christianize the Indian while a teacher was provided to educate the children. In 1835 a school was completed.

Homes were started but never finished while the farmer and schoolmaster were soon recalled. A change in governors brought Francis Bond-Head to power—a man who believed that Indians were better off to remain in their 'original condition'.

Shingwauk complained, "...you promised me houses but as yet nothing.

Yes, we are poor."

The people were indeed disillusioned with white government, but Shingwauk's hopes for his people did not die. He moved the band downstream and settled the band at Garden River.

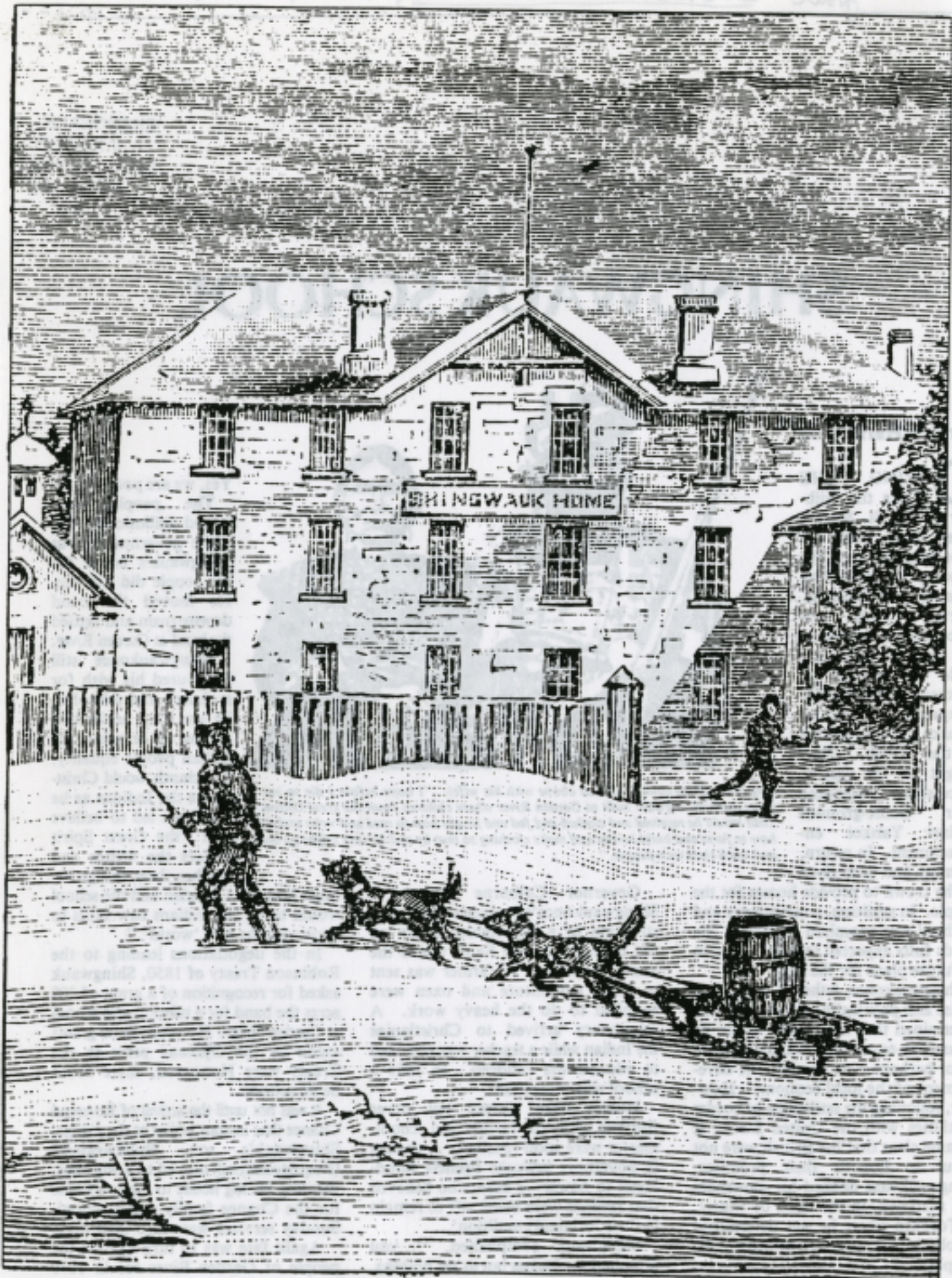
Shingwaukonce still harboured his wish for a church and school as he was these as the two means of bringing the Indian people equality. The church would Christianize the Indians as he had been led to believe that "the Great Spirit blesses the whites and teaches them things be-

cause they are Christian and the school would teach the Indians new skills to cope with the new 'world'."

In the negotiations leading to the Robinson Treaty of 1850, Shingwauk asked for recognition of a grant of 200 acres the band for a mission and school at Garden River. However, as no grants made by the Ojibway prior to the Treaty were Honoured, there could be no school.

It was not until the arrival of Reverend Chance that lessons began at the village. Shingwauk's son, Buhkweginini (Pequetchenene) moved to a wigwam, vacating his log house to make a home for the Chance family and a school. Sunday services were also held here.

Again fate was to turn against the people of Garden River for in 1870



All pictures | The Anglican Church of Canada G.S.A.



Augustine Shingwauk

Rev. Chance was transferred to the Garden River reserve. Shingwauk, who had become chief of the band when his father died, was alarmed that the people were again to be abandoned. Following in his father's footsteps he went to Toronto to plead for a school.

"The time is passed," he said, for people to live by hunting and fishing as our forefathers used to do; if we are to continue to exist at all we must learn to gain our living in the same way as the white people."

Meanwhile in hopes of getting support, Shingwauk set aside 300 acres for an Industrial School—a place where he hoped children could learn both a trade and how to survive in a changing world.

Reverend E.F. Wilson was the answer to Augustine Shingwauk's dream—a man who preached that if Christianized, there would be no limit to the success of the Indian people. Wilson taught that the Indians could be teachers, farmers, tradesmen—whatever they wished. He believed that "there is in the Indian a perfect capability of adapting himself to the customs of the white people...but he wants advantages given him while young and he requires to be drilled into the use of those advantages."

Wilson had come from England seeking "a wild free life away from the restraints of civilization." Once he received "the call" to help the Indian people make the transition from hunting and fishing to new ways of gaining a livelihood. His first mission was in Sarnia with Chief Wawanosh. When funding was cut off there he was

asked by Shingwauk to make Garden River his home. With Wilson's energy and Shingwauk's determination, the great teaching wigwam of the Chief's dream was finally to become a reality.

The Indians of Garden River had another problem to overcome—they needed money to build the Industrial School. Since there was no money forthcoming from the government or mission societies, Wilson and the principal men of Garden River set out to raise it themselves. When Shingwauk and Wilson collected only \$300 on a tour of southern Ontario, the reverend and Buhkweginini set off for England to try their luck there.

The two fund-raisers attended teas and public lectures arranged by Wilson's family connections. During these Buhkweginini would wear his traditional dress and tell Ojibway legends or of how he had become a Christian. They also sold souvenirs to the English such as photos of the reserves. They were a big success and many families signed up to sponsor an Indian child at the school.

And so the school was built—a rambling two storey frame building called "The Shingwauk Industrial Residential School" in honour of Augustine Shingwauk.

However, the problems of the chief were not over. The task of recruiting pupils proved to be a harder task than raising funds. Buhkweginini counselled the people on sending their children to the school to be educated, but parents saw little value in doing so even though the chief's son promised to send two of his own daughters. Wilson complained that the parents "seemed to care little whether their children are in their place at class or roving about the bush with bow and arrow."

The first students came instead from the south-Walpole Island and Sarnia. Since hunting and fishing had declined to a greater extent in the south, the people on these reserves were in need of learning a trade and Chief Wawanosh approved. So, the first students, Nancy Naudee and one other from Walpole along with Mary Jane Kabaoosa, Mary Jane Jacobs, Betsy Corning, Elizabeth Bird, John Rodd and Tommy Winter enrolled.

Six days after the school was built tragedy struck. The building burned to the ground. Fortunately no lives were lost. Many believed that the fire was deliberately set because of the hostility on the reserve against the school from those opposed to change.

Even this did not force Shingwauk and Wilson to give up. They rebuilt the school and this time around the task went much more smoothly. Twice as much money poured in from England and Canada only this time no tours had to be made. The town council of Sault Ste. Marie granted \$500 for Wilson to buy 92 acres on the riverfront east of Sault Ste. Marie.

The cornerstone for the new school was laid by the highest of dignitaries—the Governor General of Canada, in one of the most gala events the Sault had ever seen. A splendid luncheon was put on with all the leading citizens of the Sault in attendance.

Building did not stop with the school. A chapel was built on the river for the daily use of the students. A girls school, named Wawanosh in honour of the Sarnia chief, was also built two miles away from the boy's school. Apparently, Wilson's strict British upbringing could not bear to see both sexes housed under the same roof.

Unfortunately there was a negative side to the rebuilding of the school. The Indians were not involved in the fund-raising or planning of it and its location was eight miles from the reserve. Also the ceremonies surrounding its opening were mainly for the people of the Sault—not for the Indians. Its rebuilding marked a beginning of a split between the school and the local Indian community. It also signified the end of Indian input.

The purpose of the Shingwauk school was to lead the Ojibway from a "life of poverty, dirt and ignorance." It was patterned on other Industrial, residential schools opening across Canada during this era.

"We don't wish to un-Indianize them," said Rev. Wilson, "but for their own good, induce them to lay aside the bow and fish-spear and put their hand to the plough or make them wield the tool of the mechanic." Upon graduation it was hoped that the "Wawanosh girls and the Shingwauk boys may be united in marriage and by their good conduct and tidily kept cottages" be good examples to those on the reserve. Four areas of teaching were stressed; good personal habits such as cleanliness and being punctual, learning of English, reading and writing, trades such as carpentry or farming for the boys and house keeping for the girls.

From the moment a child arrived at the school he or she was taught the art of cleanliness whether they needed it

or not. Each was "tubbed, disinfected and hair cut." Each morning beds were made and floors were scrubbed "so clean you could eat off them." Chores were to be done in an allotted period of time always "proceeding by the bell in an orderly manner." Elijah Crow, age 10, wrote the following school essay in 1889 on tidiness:

"We ought to be tidiness while we are boys and when we are men to be tidy as can be; that is we are not to throw away our things. We are to keep them until it is very old and it cannot be used any more; but we ought not to be burnt them in fire or throw them away into the bush where it cannot be seen. And anything we want to do we ought to do it once and not to be late in the role call and we must not be late at school."

The following is a timetable of a typical day at school recorded at the turn of the century:

"The bell rings at 6 o'clock in the morning...everyone washes, gets dressed and the business of the day begins. The boys go out and do chores...There are 34 head of cattle to feed, milking to be done...wood to carry, walks to sweep, stables to clean, in fact a regular round that any farm boy knows.

"While they are engaged at this, the girls are getting breakfast. No hit and miss preparation here, but each to her task and [they are] taught to start the right, with a well cooked, wholesome breakfast, which comes to the table at 7. At 7:30 all gather for prayers...only 20 minutes but one of the great lessons has been taught.

"It is close to 8 o'clock and the boys line up to receive instructions for the day's work...half of the boys work during the morning while the other half goes to school. Between the line up time and school hours they go out and play. The girls get at their housework scrubbing, sweeping, dusting, making beds. Even the tiniest do their little tasks, if it is only to gather up the hymn books or straighten the chairs. They are little housekeepers in the making. At 8:45 the boys and girls get in line for inspection and march into school.

"School dismisses for dinner at 11:45. That gives the girls time to set the tables and put on the dinner, eat and clear up again. At 4 o'clock school lets out for the day and there is another play time. Supper is at 5:30 and then, while the girls clear away, the boys do the evening chores. In the evening there is quite little spare time. High school and entrance students study until 9 o'clock. The little children go

to bed immediately after evening prayers. In the winter they are tucked away about 7 and in the summer at dark."

The principal boasted that students were being taught to do everything for themselves. So they were, but there was an additional reason for making them work and this was a necessity. Funds were very low. In the early years children were fed on 4 cents a meal. Therefore, the school had to be almost self-supporting. Extra money was earned in Sault Ste. Marie an advertisement from 1885 reads:

"Laundry work, carpentry and shop work done at moderate rates at the Shingwauk school. Orders for shoes taken."

There were some successes among the students of Shingwauk School. For example, there was Joseph Esquimau who graduated as a teacher and opened a schoolhouse at Nipigon. Most successes, however, were bitter-sweet such as that of William Sagucheway of Walpole Island who completed high school and was to enter college to become a priest. William, who had been to England, was very respected by students and staff but he died at 19 from a cold caught while working at the school.

Sickness and death was a great cause of unhappiness among the children. Often children were sick when they arrived. Tuberculosis, called consumption in those days, was common and viruses spread quickly. A small graveyard behind the school is full of Indian children who died from such illnesses. A second cause of unhappiness was the abrupt change from life on the reserve to the unfamiliarity of school life. Another was the teaching put forth by the instructors that Indian culture was inferior. Wilson boasted that "not a word of Indian is heard from our boys after six months." This was achieved through strict discipline and rigorous punishment. Punishment was given every night at seven to those who broke any of the rules such as speaking Ojibway or being late for class. There was even a "jail" for serious offenders. Understandably Shingwauk's day book is full of reports of runaways, most of whom were found and brought back.

The greatest factor of the limited success of the Shingwauk School system in its early years was the lack of Confidence by the parents in this system. They doubted if it provided the best education for their children. The



Reverend E.F. Wilson

Ojibway educational system was very different from that of the school as the children worked with their parents and learned by imitating. Boys learned to hunt and fish beside their fathers while the girls learned to cook with their mothers.

Apprenticing to become a member of the 19th century working class could not have given much joy either. One wonders at Wilson's opinion that, "our apprentice boys work ten hours per day, six days per week and very rarely ask for a holiday. Having once become accustomed to regular work, they like it and will stick to it as well as we."

It must also be taken into consideration that there were even problems to overcome for those who did graduate from the school. Jobs were scarce and the Indians sometimes faced prejudice in the white man's working world. Older relatives and friends were often suspicious of those who took these jobs and so alienated themselves from the workers. It was difficult for the graduate to fit into either world.

However, many families were convinced to send their children to the school when Wilson would tell them of the tremendous value of training a child his way. He would travel by the Shingwauk boat, "The Evangeline," to the villages from Sarnia to Fort William and once the parents had signed up, he would sail away with the children. It was only after the boat had left that parents would realize the significance of not seeing their child for five years.

Naturally families missed having

their children at home. The day book at the school has many entries which say that the "mother took (the student) out." This, of course, greatly upset the staff.

"The parents were the greater problem...they would demand their children back again after they had been admitted some few weeks...The parents being accompanied by a retinue of

relations...which meant feeding the whole family for an indefinite period or giving up the child."

Few parents allowed a child younger than ten to leave home and the average stay at the school was two years. It was, therefore, almost impossible to obtain the kind of results that Reverend Wilson hoped for.

Wilson could see positive features. He was sure that life for the child was often happy at the school and some students did enjoy their teachings while others graduated and found jobs. The school provided a very real service in providing a home for orphan children. Yet, in his frustration over the failures he digressed further and further from his original purpose—the one shared by Shingwauk which was to create a climate of equality for the Indian people.

So the reverend suggested a break with the reserve. He decided that graduates should establish a model community from which the old people who refused to adapt to the white culture would be barred.

Then, when "integration" became the popular philosophy in the late 1880's and 1890's, he began to preach that the Indians and whites should become "one in language, one in pursuits, tastes, ambitions and hopes. What we want to do with our boys" he continued "is to make Canadians of them. When boys leave our institution, instead of returning to their old ways of living, we want them to become apprenticed out to white people and to become in fact, Canadians."

When Wilson spoke of "one" in language, ambitions and hopes he really meant that the Indian children were to give up their heritage and to become like the white man. This was not the concept of equal opportunity espoused by the Indians. They had wished to learn from the white man in order to add to the Indian way of life.

The 1890's marked the end of one era in the history of Shingwauk School. Wilson resigned in 1892 to make his home on Salt Spring Island off the coast of British Columbia. Augustine Shingwauk died in 1890 and Buhk-weginini in 1900. Without the personal interest and drive of these men the school changed drastically. It indeed became "an institution" and was no longer a dream. It became a school for those at Sault Ste. Marie rather than "for children of the great Ojibway Lake, Garden River."



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