

"INDIAN SCHOOLS IN SAULT STE. MARIE"

Don Geddes

The Shingwauk Indian Residential School, formerly known as the Shingwauk Home, owes its existence to the efforts of the Reverend E. F. Wilson, who was for many years a Church of England missionary to the Indians of Sarnia, Ontario. While recuperating from a severe illness, he visited the Garden River Indian Mission on the shores of the St. Mary's River, five miles east of Sault Ste. Marie. He immediately felt drawn to the Indians, and subsequent visits strengthened this feeling. When, in 1871, Reverend James Chance, serving missionary to the Garden River Ojibways was removed, Rev. Wilson again visited the mission. Apparently the Indians reciprocated Rev. Wilson's feelings, for, soon after, Chief Augustine Shingwauk journeyed with the missionary to Toronto to appeal to Bishop Bethune for the appointment of Rev. Wilson to his band as missionary teacher. As the old chief described it:

"The Black Coat Wilson had paid us a visit, but he was now going away and we would be left alone and uncared for. .... I will journey with this Black Coat Wilson where he is going - I will see a great Black Coat, the Bishop; I will ask the Great Black Coat also to send more teachers to the great Chippeway Lake (Lake Superior) for they are indeed very poor there, left so long in ignorance and darkness with no one to instruct them." <sup>1</sup>

While this appeal was being considered, the Chief and Rev. Wilson travelled about Southern Ontario to raise funds. The old man was a great orator, though he spoke no English, and with Rev. Wilson interpreting for him, he fascinated his audiences. He told listeners of the ignorant and degraded state his people had been in

1. Rev. E. F. Wilson, letter written in 1886 containing report of early history of Shingwauk Home.



Indian Schools in Sault Ste. Marie

before the arrival of the white man's religion, and spoke of the needs of the Indians of the North and West. So successful were his appeals that he collected considerable money towards the building of a "teaching wigwam" at Garden River, and Reverend Wilson was appointed to the mission.<sup>2</sup>

There was still not enough money to build the school, however, so Rev. Wilson, accompanied by Chief Buhkujjenene, younger brother of Chief Shingwauk, travelled to England and visited a number of places. The chief, dressed in full regalia for his various appearances, created much interest, and sufficient funds were raised to build the school.<sup>3</sup>

Returning to Garden River, Rev. Wilson completed plans for the school, and in June 1873 let the contract for the erection of an Industrial Home. In September it was completed; it was a two storey frame building one hundred feet long, with accomodation for forty pupils and it cost \$1,550. Its official name was "The Shingwauk Industrial Home", and all seemed well. However, six days after its opening, on Sunday, September 28, it burned to the ground with all its contents; fortunately no one was injured. A telegram was sent to England telling of the disaster, and within two weeks £300 had been subscribed towards the rebuilding of the school. Within a year donations in England and Canada swelled the total to £2000 and plans for a new stone building were drawn up. A new site was chosen - a ninety acre plot just east of Sault Ste. Marie on the banks of the St. Mary's River overlooking Sugar Island. On July 31, 1874, the foundation stone was laid by His Excellency the Earl of Dufferin, Governor General of Canada, who happened to be

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2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



visiting the Upper Lakes region at the time. The newly built institution<sup>4</sup> was formally opened as the Shingwauk Home on August 2nd, 1874, and the pupils, who had been accommodated in nearby cottages during the construction period, were moved in. The capacity of the new school was 60 children, with dormitories for boys and girls. During and immediately after this period of construction, various outbuildings such as barns, cottages, shops, and so forth were added.<sup>5</sup>

The first principal, of course, was Reverend Wilson, and it is thanks to his careful records that we know much about the early days of the Home and its pupils. Besides making a letter press copy of every letter he wrote, and binding the copies into indexed books, he kept a large book similar to a ledger called "General Report of All Pupils Received at Our Indian Home".<sup>6</sup>

In this he meticulously recorded the personal history and school record of each of the pupils he admitted, and though many gaps occur, we can follow the course of no fewer than 558 pupils between August 6, 1874 and June 5, 1893, when Rev. Wilson left. [REDACTED]

A typical entry is the first one in the book. On August 6, 1874, Adam Kijoshk (Gull) of the reserve at Walpole Island, Ont. was registered. He was a 16 year old Ojibway supported by the Church of England congregation of St. Paul's, London, Ont. When admitted he was "reading the 4th book, was handy with tools, and spoke fair English". It was decided that he would continue his school work and be trained as

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4. See figure 1

5. Rev. E. F. Wilson, loc. cit.

6. See figure 2.



a carpenter. When he left four years later he was "well advanced in school work; a good carpenter". Reverend Wilson later recorded:

"Carpentry and ship building. Married Alice Wawanash. Also employed diving. His boy A. L. Kojoshk came to Shingwauk in 1888. 1892 - 2 children, A. L. and Mabel - neat frame house."

Adam did very well, but not all were as rewarding. Pupil number 84 was a 13 year old Ojibway boy from Michipicoten, Lake Superior, names Louis Morris Minwahsin (or, to quote his Indian name, Muswadeens: Little Man Over There). His religion was classified as "Pagan" and he was "wild and untaught" when admitted. However, at the Home he "made fair progress, was one of 78 baptized on Oct. 27." His name, Louis Joesph, was chosen by his supporter, Mrs. Maynard, of Windsor, N.S. His record comes to a sad and abrupt end; he "dies of consumption on Sept. 18/79 and (was) buried in Shingwauk cemetery".

There is a great variety of interesting stories in this volume. One was the record of Sebastian Brant of the Mohawk Reserve at Tyendinaga, Bay of Quinte, "lineal descendant of Joseph Brant"; he was a "very quick boy who made great progress - learned telegraphy". On the other hand pupils 341 and 344 were somewhat less successful; they were three boys and a girl from the Sioux nation in Manitoba, two of whom arrived on July 3, 1888, and two of whom registered on the 10th. All ran away on July 14. An extremely interesting and unique entry tells of John Nzipo, age 22, of Zululand, Africa, who "read the IV book, and was well advanced. Speaks poor English".

Some interesting generalizations can be made from a study of Reverend Wilson's records. The pupils represented a great variety of tribes and geographical areas. There were Mohawks, Ojibways,



Ottawas, Munceys, and Delewares from Ontario, Chipewyans and Crees from the North, Assiniboines, Sioux, Blackfeet, and Bloods from the prairies, and half breeds from all over. They came from Alberta, from Northern Quebec, from Michigan, and from Algoma. But at least 75% of the pupils were Ojibways, and at least the same proportion came from Ontario.

Although the children ranged in ages from 6 years to 22 years when enrolled, the majority were in the 10 to 15 year group. About 7 in 10 were boys. The school was a Church of England institution, so 7 out of 10 pupils belonged to that communion on arrival; however, the school was open to any child whose parents lived on Treaty lands and applied for admission, and approximately 2 out of every 10 were officially listed as "Pagan" or "Heathen" in those early years, with the remainder everything from Roman Catholic to Methodist. The length of stay varied from eight years down to two days, (at least 4 ran away after this period of time), but the average stay seems to have been one to three years.

On arrival, as may be expected, the children displayed a wide range of capabilities and degrees of civilization. Rev. Wilson usually made some sort of reference to their ability such as "handy with tools", "no English", "alphabet", "doing addition", "doing IV Book", "geography", and so on. He also tried to sum up their general condition, with such phrases as "quiet and well behaved", "ragged and neglected", "bright and intelligent", "steady and good humoured", "rather bad tempered", etc. The most common notation was "wild and untaught".

Under the heading "Progress Made" Reverend Wilson noted a wide range of accomplishment. While many made "not much progress", others were, when released, "well advanced". One girl was "reading 3rd book, speaking good



English, and a fair seamstress". One bright fellow "learned Algebra, Euclid, Latin, and Greek ". Another did the "first few pages of Part I figures". Quite a few ran away or died before making any notable progress, while one recalcitrant boy was, in Rev. Wilson's words, "too conceited to learn much".

It is obvious that the school had a dual approach to the problems of educating its young charges. First, the children were taught academic subjects, with emphasis on spoken and written English, and whatever simple arithmetic and geography could be imparted during their relatively short stay. A few of the brighter ones went on to study algebra, Euclid, history, grammar, Latin, Greek, and "Medicine" (probably simple first aid). These latter pupils, who stayed for several years, were usually being groomed as teachers, and the record notes that several actually did become teachers, with mixed success. Religious training was a part of the curriculum, and many of the children were baptized, though Rev. Wilson notes with just a touch of regret that one girl was "still RC" years later.

Along with teaching the traditional subjects noted above, the school decided that each child should learn a trade. Thus, each one, according to his bent, was assigned to a particular trade. Where possible they were trained right at the school, as laundresses, bakers, blacksmiths, tailors, housemaids, and so on; no doubt their labours as they learned saved the school considerable money in hired labour. Some of the boys spent part of each day with various merchants and tradesmen in Sault Ste. Marie doing what we now call 'on the job training'.<sup>7</sup> Many of Rev. Wilson's letters

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7. See figure 3.



deal with the problems inherent in this sort of arrangement; some of the employers apparently took advantage of the cheap labour this system afforded, and the principal frequently had to remonstrate with various local lights over certain questionable actions.<sup>8</sup>

During these first years the school supplied many of its own wants through the shops in which the children were trained. A blacksmith, carpenter, mason, laundress, cook, tailor, and other specialized personnel were employed to supervise the trades training of the children and save the school money. For many years it was self-sufficient, or nearly so, in food. Besides having a large garden, the School kept pigs, cows, and chickens, and it is noted in the Principal's Record that many of the pupils studied the trade of "Farmer". During the tenure of Rev. Wilson the School turned out nineteen carpenters, two weavers, fifteen bookmakers, six telegraphers, at least fifteen schoolteachers, and numerous farmers, smiths, cooks and laundresses.

Reverend Wilson tried his best to record the later history of each child who left the school. Generally speaking, the children failed in attempts to use the trades skills learned at the Shingwauk; however, many did quite well, and there are many different types of entries about the children as there were children. He attempted to group them into "Good, Indifferent, or Bad", according to what he heard about each. An entry such as "led immoral life" is followed by a stern figure "1" under the Bad column, while entries such as "living respectably" or "well furnished house" produced a figure "1" under the Good column. While some of his alumnae had "been in jail" or were "not married but had 2 illegitimate

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8. See figure 4.



children", the majority of the entries are of such respectable and prosaic stuff as "doing odd jobs" or "is a communicant". One who seems to have rated the Good he received was "employed as a catechist and school teacher at Nigigon; married, 2 children - wife died, and moved to Little Current". Sadly, many entries are typified by the following: "died of brain fever and buried at Shingwauk Cemetery".

In 1883 a stone chapel was built on the grounds of the school, and services were held regularly for all of the pupils. Rev. Wilson in one of his letters while talking about a weekday service in the chapel wrote a few lines which seem to illustrate one of the aims of the school:

"It was indeed an interesting sight to see those children, many of them no doubt gathered from homes where paganism, ignorance and filth combined to make life wretched; now there they stand, well dressed, clean and wholesome looking and unitedly lifting up their voices in the House of the Lord in songs of praise. As we listened to the singing we could almost imagine we heard the strains of some surpliced choir in England".

As the number of pupils increased, it became necessary to provide additional accommodation, and in 1879 a second school known as the Wawanosh Home for Girls was opened on five acres of land just north of Sault Ste. Marie in what is now Tarentorus Township.<sup>10</sup> Names after an Indian chief at Samia, a friend of Rev. Wilson's, the school was made of stone gathered by the Shingwauk boys in their playtime. It could accommodate 25-30 girls, and though it was a separate building it was considered a part of the Shingwauk for administrative purposes. It is interesting to note that Chief Wawanosh's daughter was the Alice Wawanosh who married Adam Kijoshk, the first pupil of the Shingwauk Home.

In 1894 Reverend Wilson was posted elsewhere, and he was replaced

10. See figures 6 and 7.

*Bishop  
Wilson  
Chapel*



as principal by Mr. George Seymour King. Mr. King worked with the same zeal that Rev. Wilson displayed, and under him the Homes continued to progress. Our main source of information of this period is the various annual reports issued by the principal. The one for the year 1900<sup>11</sup> is typical, and gives us a good idea of the condition of the time and how the school was operated. The report lists 75 in attendance in the year 1900, with 61 boys at the Shingwauk and 14 girls at the Wawanosh Home. Near the Shingwauk there were several buildings; - Principal's residence, a large building with drill hall downstairs and classrooms upstairs, hospital, hospital attendant's cottage, carpenter's shop, farmer's cottage, shoe shop, barns, stables, and various other minor buildings.

Mr. King emphasized in his report that the Homes were strictly Diocesan institutions under the control of the Bishop of Algoma. Since there was no endowment of any kind, "the work depended on voluntary contributions from three sources; (a) Support of individual children by Sunday Schools and branches of the Women's Auxiliary in Canada. (b) Grants from different church societies in England and Canada such as the S.P.C.K. and the D. & F.M. Society. (c) General and private contributions supplemented by a \$60 per capita grant from the Dominion Government based upon each pupil's attendance."<sup>12</sup>

He went on to say that the actual cost of maintaining a child for one year was \$125, so that non-government contributions had to make up over half of the expenses; all donations of money, clothing, toys, candies, books, were acknowledged by letter and also by inclusion in the Annual Report. Subscriptions and donations came from individuals and groups in England and Canada, and they ranged in value from \$50 given by

11. 26th Annual Report of the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Homes, Missionary Diocese of Algoma, April, 1901.

12. Ibid.



the New England Company down to 74¢ donated by "Mr. Guyon, per Mrs. Smith for freight bale". No gift was too small to be overlooked, and obviously a small gift was as appreciated by the school as much as a large one.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. King clarified for his readers the method by which pupils were selected to attend the school. They had to be

"of a suitable age, viz. from 7 to 15, physically sound, and shall remain in the institution for such term as the authorities may deem proper".<sup>14</sup>

Those who met the above qualifications were then obtained in one of three ways:

"(a) Through Church of England missionaries, Indian Agents and chief men of the various Bands.

(b) Upon Bishop's recommendation based upon his knowledge and personal contact with the applicants in his Lordship's travels throughout the Diocese

(c) By the parents applying personally, and bringing their children and not uncommonly numerous other members of their family together with all their worldly good packed in canoes or boats and often travelling long distances in order to accomplish their object."<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes the Principal had a difficult time persuading the relatives to leave, and at least once had to be very firm with a father who was all set to build a log hut on the grounds and wait till his daughter's education was finished! When a pupil was admitted he was "tubbed, his hair cut, and if the stores permitted, a double outfit of clothing given him, each article of which is marked with a particular number assigned to him and by which, in addition to his name he is henceforth known".<sup>16</sup> He was then assigned to a dormitory and graded either Junior or Senior for instructional purposes.

The report included several letters from individual students

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13. Ibid

14. Ibid

15. Ibid

16. Ibid



addressed to "My Dear Friends", and these, besides describing the work and play at the Home, thanked the readers for assistance given and extended greetings to them appropriate to the particular time of year that each letter was written.

The overall financial picture of the institution was carefully detailed, and revealed a net operating deficit for the year of \$320.74; total receipts amounted to \$8,276.85 plus "a net gain on all trades of \$14.16." As noted previously, the various trades played an important part in the economy of the Home, and the expenses and receipts for the farm, carpenter, bootmaker, weaver, and tailor are listed in detail under "General Statement of Receipts and Payments"; the farm showed a profit of \$160.77, but the other trades all lost money. The financial report closed with an invitation to individuals and groups to support an Indian child, and ladies who wished to make clothing were requested to send for instructions on how to make the uniform - "dark navy blue, trimmed with red, and brass buttons".<sup>17</sup>

In 1906 Rev. Benjamin Fuller replaced Mr. King as Principal, and two important events marked his tenure. In 1911 an extension was built on the Shingwauk Home,<sup>18</sup> and the girls were moved back there from the Wawanosh Home; the Home was sold, and used for many years as a Children's Shelter, (demolished and replaced by the Canadian Legion Building though now it is used for municipal offices by Tarentorus. In 1922 the Homes were put under the management of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada, though Algoma Diocese still had considerable say in its affairs.<sup>19</sup>

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17. Ibid

18. See figure 1

19. The Church in Algoma, A Souvenir of the Diocesan Jubilee, 1923.



In 1926 Rev. Fuller was replaced by Rev. C. F. Hives, and a sketch written by him for a special supplement to the Algoma Missionary News<sup>20</sup> tells us about this period. He relates how his first impression of appreciation of the exterior beauty and charm of the school turned to dismay at the "ill planned, unsanitary, and dilapidated condition of the interior" and of the "multitude of rats which appeared to inhabit the old building".<sup>21</sup> In the next few years he worked hard to convince the Diocese that it should turn over the property to the government, and to convince the government that it must find the money to erect a new building. Various reports submitted by him, the Bishop, the local Fire Chief, and the M.P. for Sault St. Marie, Mr. Tom Simpson, had their effect, and even though these were depression years, the Federal Government finally agreed "to take over the property and in return erect a building fit and worthy of the work of housing and education and caring for Indian children".<sup>22</sup> The new building finished in 1934, was a three storey brick building erected behind the original one, and it still stands today.<sup>23</sup> Besides housing some 140 children it contained staff rooms, offices, sewing room, auditorium, classrooms, gymnasium, staff and student lounges, kitchen, and dining room. The old building was demolished the following year and it marked the end of an era. From 1934 the Dominion Government paid sufficiently large per capita grant that, combined with donations which continued to come in from Anglican churches, it kept the school's finances in the black.

Reverend Hives was succeeded in 1941 by Reverend Arthur Minchin, and

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20. Special Supplement 40 Algoma Missionary News, 1944

21. Ibid

22. Ibid

23. See figure 9



his contribution to the Report of 1944 was written in the present tense.

He wrote:

"There are now 130 boys and girls in residence....Any Treaty Indian who wishes to do so may send his child to an Indian Boarding School.....the Government builds the schools and pays an annual per capita grant....the M.S.C.C. administers the schools through the Indian Residential School Commission and the W.A. pays the salaries of all women workers and provides clothing for the girls and younger boys....in addition to their studies in the class-room the boys work on the farm and in the garden while the girls do the housework....when the war is over we hope to have instruction in manual training and handicrafts....after school everyone is free until milking time....." <sup>24</sup>

He went on to emphasize the fact that the children were provided with the same activities that white children their age participated in - Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, choir, concerts, parties, and so forth. Around this time, also, it became the practice to permit boys and girls who passed their entrance to attend the Technical School or Collegiate Institute; "This year we have seventeen taking advantage of this opportunity". <sup>25</sup>

It was Rev. Minchin who gave the School its school song and aim; since the name 'Shingwauk' means 'Pine Tree', he chose the following verse from the hymn "God Who Touchest Earth With Beauty":

"Like thy dancing waves in sunlight  
Make me glad and free.  
Like the straightness of the pine tree,  
Let me upright be." <sup>26</sup>

Reverend Minchin was replaced in 1948 by Rev. Douglas Wickenden, and he, in turn, was succeeded in 1954 by Rev. Roy Phillips, the present Principal. During these last fifteen years the character of the School has changed greatly. The Dominion Government took on more and more of the expense of operating the institution, making supplementary contributions

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24. Ibid

25. Ibid

26. Ibid



virtually unnecessary. The need to be self-sufficient in food, upkeep of buildings, supply of clothing, and so on was also eliminated, and the stables, shops, pig pens, and chicken houses finally disappeared, though the latter hung on until Rev. Phillips' time. Early in this period the pupils stopped wearing special uniforms, and now resemble any group of Sault Ste. Marie school children in their up-to-date styles. They attend church downtown on occasion, go to movies, play on various school teams, and in general have much more freedom than their predecessors had. The choice of pupils to enter the school now lies with the Indian Agent on each Reservation, and the majority of the pupils come from Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec.

A far-reaching change occurred in 1956, when it was decided that the best interests of the Indian children would be served by integrating them into the Sault Ste. Marie Public School System. Accordingly, in that year, 19 pupils were enrolled in the Grades 7 and 8 classes of the Anna McCrea Public School. In succeeding years, more were thus transferred, and by 1961 all had been placed in various public schools. They were spread out in this manner to avoid too heavy a concentration in a particular school as well as to alleviate overcrowding in the Anna McCrea. At the moment, 148 children live at the Shingwauk School but attend classes at five public schools, travelling by bus where necessary. Besides, their regular school studies, they have two hours per evening of home study and supplementary work under qualified teachers at the Shingwauk; the need for this is obvious when one reflects that the majority started school at a late age, attended a variety of schools for varying times, and still have language problems when they reach this centre. Only pupils of Grades 7



and 8 come to the Shingwauk, now, and the majority complete their elementary schooling and go on to high school. The Shingwauk School has thus become as much a hostel as a school.

Though I can say, from personal experience in my own school that none of the present pupils are "wild and untaught", integration has its minor problems. Most of them are shy, very quiet and withdrawn, and diffident with adults. However, patience on the part of public school teachers combined with the tender loving care given at the Shingwauk has produced amazing results in the past few years, and the youngsters have fitted in extremely well with the other children in spite of great background differences. It is to be hoped that just as the Shingwauk School has moved with the times, the lot of the children it cares for will continue to improve so that they will more and more be able to take their places as citizens with all the rights and privileges which are their due.