TEACHING IN NORTHERN ALBERTA COMMUNITIES

The Importance of Place, Past and Present

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Acknowledgements

The author wishes to recognize the support received from Grande Prairie Regional College and the University of Alberta in this enterprise, along with the assistance of a grant from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.

Rationale

This work is intended as an introduction to how school-teaching in northern Alberta may be affected by past and present conditions of nature, human settlement, and history of schooling in the region. Teacher education in Canada is served by different programs that reflect their provincial location. It is necessary for these to include mirror images of the curricula and school governance legislation of their respective provincial jurisdictions. It is usually thought not necessary to include descriptions of the impact of physiographic features and historical schooling memories as elements that importantly affect the conditions of being a teacher in that region. However, this may create a situation of " necessary but not sufficient"' the further north one goes in anticipation of teacher service. Awareness of location may be essential to informed anticipation of teaching in northern regions outside the larger conurbations of southern Canada. This small book is designed to provide for beginning and incoming teachers to northern Alberta just such a sense of "place".

Alberta's provincial north is part of Canada's huge boreal north, the largest physiographic region in the country, stretching from British Columbia to Quebec. It broadly occupies the latitudes between 55 and 60 degrees north. In many ways the boreal north is Canada'a forgotten north, lying between the cosmopolitanism of the southern cities and the dramatic tales of Arctic adventure. Yet were one to ask most Canadians – and non-Canadians even more likely – for iconic images of Canada, then tocques, chequed shirts, loons on northern lakes, moose wading in reed rimmed ponds, tangled black spruce against setting sun, snow lying in dark northern woods would figure largely. These are actually all images of one region– the boreal north. The challenge is that knowledge of the regjon often stops at these images, importantly short of an informed introduction to the conditions of school-teaching there.

As part of that boreal north, northern Alberta is essentially everything north of Edmonton up to the border with the Northwest Territories. It constitutes more than one third of the province, while making up only one-twentieth of the population, fifteen percent of whom are Aboriginal, one hundred times the 0.15% weighting for the province as a whole. There may not be such a thing as an entirely unique character to that schooling, but there has been its own experience.

That experience still affects teaching conditions today, especially among the Aboriginal population. This book is written in the belief that hiring and retention of teachers in the region, especially in the more distant communities, will be aided by candidates being provided with increased knowledge of this special land, its people and their hopes for the schooling of their children. In addition, some of the general descriptions may have broader application through parallels with the situation in other parts of our provincial norths across the country.

The content is part of the teacher-education program at Grande Prairie Regional College in northwest Alberta. That program was developed collaboratively with the University of Alberta in order to enhance hiring and retention of teachers in northern Alberta, especially the more distant communities. It is believed that an increased knowledge of the region and of its experience with schooling will improve pedagogical decision-making. It is also hoped that such knowledge will encourage the belief that a teaching 'life', in the fullest sense of that term, can be found in our provincial north. Because no published materials existed in the form of commercial texts, the material was collected over many years, beginning with personal experience by the author in the classrooms of the region, including times of frustration and failure. That experience was gained most extensively in the Peace River Country of the northwest and most hauntingly in Fort Chipewyan in the extreme northeast. It is also based on wide-ranging research and interviews conducted with graduates and active educators in schools and communities of northern Alberta, work carried out over the last decade.

There has never been a history of schooling in northern Alberta. Part of the reason may be the Cinderella like status of our provincial north, along with all other provincial norths within Canada's provinces. 'The forgotten north' was the judgement of Ken Coates and William Morrrison in 1992; they saw its story as neglected between the political weight of the region of major Euro-Canadian settlement south of the 55th parallel and the exotic 'otherness' of the territories north of 60. (Coates and Morrison, *The Forgotten North*). The first and last general history of schooling in Alberta was written by John W. Chalmers in 1967 and it remains a valuable contribution to the history of schooling in Alberta.(Chalmers, *Schools of the Foothills Province*) It did incorporate specific references to events and conditions in northern Alberta in very discrete historical situations: the fur trade in the first half of the 19th century, the ordinances of the North West Territories in the latter part of that century, and the establishment of Northland

School Division in 1961. Apart from these exotic times (before provincial status) and exotic people (Native people) the impression is left that the development of schooling in Alberta has been a fairly uniform experience from the 49th to the 60th parallel.

There are reasons to think that the experiences of schooling in northern Alberta might show some differences from the rest of the province. Issues of schooling linked to isolation and distance have always been even more marked. It is at least one climatic zone north of central and two zones north of southern Alberta, making the winter experience more prolonged and more severe. It is the region of the longest extended contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal inhabitants, having been the Eldorado of the fur trade from the late 17th to the 19th century. Its dark northern woods made it possible for some meaningful version of a traditional Aboriginal system of production , in turn supporting traditional culture, to survive well into the 20th century. Here also was where the long retreat northwestwards from Red River over the course of a century ended for many Metis. And here was the delayed frontier of the Euro-Canadian homesteader, the Last Great West in which there could occur a replication of the dominant ecumene of the south.

It was Northrop Frye, our country's most insightful literary critic, who insisted on the importance of the question – " Where is here?" – regarding Canadian literature.

... there would be nothing distinctive in Canadian literature at all if there were not some feeling for the immense searching distance, with the lines of communication extended to the absolute limit, which is a primary geographical fact about Canada and has no real counterpart else where. (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, 10)

This book tries to respond to the same question with regard to teacher education for service in the provincial north.

The contents are presented in a two-layer format. It is expected that the reader, most likely a person investigating the challenges and opportunities of teaching in northern Alberta, may wish to begin with` the chapters outlined in bold in the Table of Contents. These set out the present conditions of teaching in northern Alberta in its three most typical school-community contexts: small urban, rural, and remote Native. The intervening chapters, italicized in the Table of Contents, are intended to provide increased knowledge of the natural and human history of our

provincial north, particularly as it might impact schooling today, and with special attention to the Native experience. The hope is that the intending teacher will return to catch these glimpses of the broader contexts of their vocation in this special place.`

This work is motivated by a care for a region that is marginalized in the decision centres of our province, let alone the country. It is made urgent by the schooling crisis in the remote northern Native communities of this region and those located in the same latitudes across the country. I am reminded of the 'cri de coeur' of the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism which declared that Canada was sleepwalking through the most serious crisis in its history. I believe that the crisis in Native education in our northern regions is the greatest crisis facing Canadian schooling today and unless tackled from a multitude of directions, by a multitude of constituences, that not only northern children but our whole country will pay a very heavy price in the future that is demographically rushing toward us. This book is written in the belief that such commitment must arise from a commitment to the place itself through greater knowledge of all that has and does affect its schooling. It is an effort to explain what it means to teach 'here', in our provincial north.

1.

Schools in a landscape: northern Alberta's 'big history'

a.Two norths

It has been argued that the key to living a satisfying life is the ability to control and enjoy one's experiences. These are importantly affected by our surroundings – the place where we live our lives and work. In the case of being a teacher in northern Alberta appreciation for one's experiences might starts from reflection on the idea of our Canadian north by notable Canadian writers and artists.

There is a strong sense of awe in the responses to our furthest north, our Arctic north, by some of Euro-Canadian culture's most remarkable writers: Mary Shelley set the beginning and end of her *Frankenstein* in the Arctic , as the place like no other where extraordinary events could be portrayed. Barry Lopez in *Arctic Dreams* suggests that one of humankind's persistent dreams has been to find a place that represents life essential – without human presence. Pierre Berton described the north as a window out into infinity, Margaret Atwood as the place you go to find some key to oneself, the place of the quest. So often the latter has been associated with tragic images: Franklin's outflung hand reaching for the Northwest Passage in the 1840s; young Edgar Christian penning the last letter to his mother as he faced starvation on the Barren Grounds in the 1920s in the attempt to be the first to winter over in that harsh land; Christopher McCandless facing life's end in an old bus after choosing to move ' Into the Wiild' of the Alaskan wilderness in the 1990s.

Yet it is actually the subarctic north, rather than that extreme north, which has provided the most self-defining images of the northern character of our country. It is the provincial norths of the Canadian Shield and the boreal forest that are the source of some of the most famous icons of

Canada: the wedge-shaped flights of geese, the moose amidst the black spruce, the fur-trader, voyageur, lumberjack, miner and prospector, checked flannel shirts, tuques, snowshoes, bushplanes, the paintings of A. Y. Jackson and the Group of Seven. And how much more for the Aboriginal people , as noted by Richard Wagamese , an Ojibway from northern Ontario.

There's a moment in this life that I love every time it happens. It's tha moment when you step into the bush and feel it close itself behind you. Kinda like the door to a favorite room. Only this room's the biggest one in the world and it's full of everything you want around you.You look straight ahead of you at that moment and all you can see is the power of the rough and tangle. Something as direction gets all erased by the power of nature, the land expressing itself. The rough and tangle. You take a hundred steps and stop. In every direction there's only the law of the land. Those areas where there are no paths, no blazes on trees, no sound of roads or motors to comfort your city senses and no end to it all, are those places where that magic happens. The door to nature's room closing behind you. (Wagamese, *Keeper'n me, 168)*

All this is the larger context of the schooling experienced in northern Alberta.

W.L. Morton described ' this alternate penetration of wilderness and return to civilization that is the basic rhythm of Canadian life, the violence of the one and the restraint required by the other', as like the deep rhythm of our blood beat, felt silently by us all (Morton, *The Canadian Identity*, 5). It is this difference in rhythm that is so evident the further north one moves in Alberta. The proportions of human to nature's presence shift dramatically. No institution contrasted with and continues to represent this difference more than the schoolroom. No institution of the north was more deliberately designed to uphold the problematic concept of 'civilization' than the schoolhouse and nowhere was the wilderness more of a presence.

b. Winter is for schooling

Almost all these images of our north are silently contexed against one main season : winter. Gilles Vignault captured this so hauntingly in the opening lines of his 1972 chanson 'Mon Pays' (1972):

Mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver,

Mon jardin, ce n'est pas un jardin, c'est la pleine,

Mon chemin, ce n'est pas un chemin, c'est la neige.

My country is not a country, it is winter,

My garden is not a garden, it is the plain,

My road is not a road, it is the snow.

It was recaptured in the arresting statement " *Without winter, north is just a direction, not a place"* .(Coates and Morrison, " Winter and the Shaping of Northern History") The rhythm of schooling in Europe, the rhythm that was to be imposed on Native and not-Native children alike, was organized around an economy of agricultural activity between spring and fall. Since schooling was scheduled to occur during the months when children would not be required for farm work, schooling in that culture was – and remains – an institutional activity associated most with winter.

In northern Alberta pupil and teacher are very conscious of the key sacramental points in the school calendar that mark the intimation of , the onset, the depth, and the emergence from the overarching presence of winter: Thanksgiving, Halloween, Christmas, and Easter. The climate of our provincial north is fundamentally the outcome of our latitude between 55 and 60 degrees north, our distance from Hudson Bay, our separation from the Rockies from the more moist air

of the Pacific, and our openness to fronts coming flowing down the Mackenzie Valley from the Arctic. This produces a continental climate overall, with relatively short hot summers and prolonged cold winters. The extremes of both major seasons, winter particularly, increase as one moves eastward further onto the plains. The moderating winds of the Pacific may still slip over the lesser heights of the northern Rockies in the west. These are usually signalled by flying saucer shaped lenticular clouds, the remains of cloud moisture blowing off the mountain peaks in the summer or a solid cloud arch in the western sky in the winter. These are generally confined to the western region of northern Alberta and are much less dramatic than found in southern Alberta, although an authoritative source claims that near Peace River town in 1930, a man carried his skis up a snow covered hill and that by the time he reached the top, the slopes behind him were bare. (Longley, "Climate and Weather Patterns") All parts of northern Alberta are open to frigid Arctic fronts coming down the Mackenzie Valley. December, January and February are the official winter months in the northern cool temperate zone in which Alberta lies, with January and February competing for title of most frigid. When the wind comes then the wind chill (estimated at one and a half degrees lower for each mile of wind speed) can be fatal. The relief lies in the many days of still air and blue skies, where the low humidity of the frigid temperatures makes for a "dry" cold. Nonetheless, In wintertime in the boreal forest of northern Alberta the clichéd statement that 'The sun is the source of all life' seems belied below such clear skies. The shallow angle at which this region receives the sun in winter means that much of the daylight radiation is diffused and lost as it takes such a longer passage through the atmosphere than in the equatorial climes; and on cloudless nights, such modest energy as has been gained flows back into the heat sink of the universe and we feel at one with the absolute frigidness of space itself. The cold is the escape of such surface warmth as there is into the great heat sink of that clear northern sky. The clearness brings days of sparkling sun set in a cloudless blue sky. The cold bright daylight sky was and remains the accompaniment to our schooling. But early darkness grasps at the heels of children bound for school and shrouds the home they head for at schoolday's end.

Schooling arrangements in northern Alberta have always been affected by the climate accompanying these clear winter skies of northern Alberta . The winter brightness raises the

spirits but does nothing to check the draining away of such small surface warmth as is provided by our low slung sun into the heat sink of such cloudless skies. The most severe weeks of winter were the time for aboriginal teaching to change rhythm and content from watching and copying skills of food gathering and preparation in the open air to listening and reflecting on the oblique lessons contained within the stories of the raven trickster Wihsakecahk told in winter shelters. In the early homesteading communities it was recognized that the country school which required the child to walk or ride up to two miles each way daily put the child at risk in the depth of winter and it remained closed often in the north country for January and February. The residential schools for aboriginal children retained their charges in all seasons, though the building were poorly insulated and inadequately heated.

c. Falling for Snow

Winter also means snow in Alberta, with the northern forests collecting an average of five feet per year, often beginning in October and lying on northern slopes into May. (Longley, 'Cllimate and Weather Patterns") Surely there can be no experience of schooling more familiar still today in Alberta's north than that the excited turning to the classroom window as the season's first snowflakes appear. It is not fear of the cold or the blizzard that is central to that thrill, but joy at the anticipation of special fun and festivals, which need snow for their setting and their doing. It is odd to note that snow, a natural condition so central to the schooling experience in northern Alberta ,was never provided with a place, let alone pride of place, as subject or theme in the curriculum – though we can anticipate that those who lived by hunting and later made trapping a fourth leg in their traditional round, along with fishing and gathering, studied and imparted knowledge of snow's differing conditions, opportunities and limitations. In *Falling for Snow* (2003) Jamie Bastedo, broadcaster and naturalist in Yellowknife, NWT, has tried to convey both knowledge of and the magic of snow; such matters as were sensed by every child whose desk , though furthest from the classroom stove, was closest to the window beyond which the snowflakes were falling. He wonders , for example, at the inadequacy of computer models to simulate the hexagonal symmetry of the snow crystals.

What's missing in their model is some kind of organizing formula that explains how snow crystals grow with such utter perfection. How, for instance, do molecules on one side of a growing crystal " know" what position and at what rate they should arrange themselves to match exactly what's happening on the opposite side? (Bastedo, *Falling for Snow,* 46)

He delights in the suggestion by one physicist that the feedback of vibrations from the outer edges of the crystal lattice as it floats and tumbles down through the atmosphere may act as prompts.

If this is so, then the growing snowflake maintains its symmetry in the same way that members of an orchestra stay in consonance, by sharing the sound of the ensemble. The snowflake's beauty, then, is orchestral. (Bastedo, *Falling for Snow,* 47)

His rehearsal of efforts – Scoresby, Glaisher, Bentley - to categorize the different patterns of snowflakes could be the springboard to the introductory exercises in arithmetic. His explanation of the oft repeated claim that no two snowflakes are the same is not deflating but exhilarating in conveying the size of the world of numbers. If 10 to the power 35 snowflakes may have fallen since the first snowfall on earth, including our small north, consider that each crystal contains 10 to the power 18 molecules of water, themselves capable of a million configurations.

The flake first forms in the upper atmosphere as a molecule of water condensed around a fleck of airborne dust. As other molecules of water vapour collected on these crystals, they assumed the first shape of perfect hexagonal shafts with lintels like classical columns, which in their uncounted numbers formed the trailing ice clouds of cirrostratus. When the rising sun's rays shone through to create the halo of the sundog, then those below knew that snow was sure to fall. Because the snow crystal had now become too heavy for the faint updrafts to keep it aloft, it began to fall and as it fell to lose its plates becoming only a rigid column, until it passed through

a cloud of supercooled droplets becoming a many armed crystal that was blown in collision with other crystals untll fragmented and uneven it landed in the school yard. Now snowflakes became snow banks. The degrading began almost instantly as flake pressed down upon flake. Those crystals with the most delicate tracery were the first to go. Finally all became reduced , like pebbles rolled together endlessly in the stream, to physic's most recidivist shape: an undifferentiated sphere, perfect for snowballs in the schoolyard. Which may explain another possibility of snow, this time with the pupils inside the classroom.

Check out your local library terminal or favorite online book browser and type in the word 'snow'. Most of your hits will send you to the kids' section. I tried it and scored close to five hundred titles. Fewer than a quarter of them were aimed at adults. There's a reason for this. Unlike many grownups, most children have an untarnished affection for snow. Their hearts lie way over on the reverence end of the snow appreciation spectrum – though of course they'd never call it that. " Awesome" would do just fine for most kid. (Bastedo, *Falling for Snow,* 110)

Bllizzards, however, are also 'awesome'. When blizzards occur the swirling snow becomes whiteout all sense of direction is lost, even before a child leaves the school yard. Blizzards represent the life-threatening aspect of snow for schoolchildren, as noted by Charyk in his description of the anxiety created in the early days of settlement.

Parents who waited for their children to come home from school after a blizzard blew up near dismissal time knew what an agonizing interim it was. They knew from experience that large drifts formed rapidly on the unfenced fields so that horses floundered, stumbled and plunged to break through….They heard the storm rage and roar around the corners of the house and wondered if their children were still at school or somewhere out in the snowy turbulence. (Charyk, *Pulse of the Community,* 109)

Even with the communication and school closure protocols for winter storms today, anxiety for teacher and parents still occurs.

d. Necklace of stars

A necklace is the appropriate image for the sight of the increasing company of permanent circumpolar stars the further north one travels. If winter is defined as darkness and cold, the darkness reveals the stars. In the gathering gloom of late winter afternoons and in the darkness of clear winter evenings in northern Alberta the stars come out like diamonds.

In the northern hemisphere the first European immigrants to this region at the end of the 18th century were accustomed to orienting themselves to Polaris, the north star. When the first native peoples had moved into northern Alberta as the Laurentian icefield retreated more than five thousand years before the 18th century, around the time when large scale society began to form on the banks of the Nile river, the earth's precessionary orbit had not yet made Polaris the mark of true north. The star Thuban, in the constellation of Draco, was the truer mark for those who built the pyramids in Egypt and those who originally devised the seasonal round of hunting and gathering in our north.

For observers between 55 and 60 degrees north, the boundary latitudes of Alberta's provincial north, the circumference of the circle of stars that swing around the celestial pole, Polaris, would include the Big and Little Dippers, Draco and Cepheus. These names are derived from the cultures of ancient Middle East, Greece and Rome. For aboriginals, depending on the nation, Polaris was Great Star or Guide of the People, the Big Dipper might be Fisher (a member of the weasel family), or be set within a diorama wherein the stars in the handle of the dipper represented hunters, one carrying a cooking pot, following the bear from his den in the Northern Crown, Corona Borealis, from Spring until he was killed in the Fall as the Northern Crown sank below the celestial horizon once more and the earth's leaves turned red with his blood (Fabian, *Patterns in the Sky: An Introduction to Ethnoastronomy*, 9-11). Some scholars emphasize the

significant cultural difference between Western society's increasing mental separation of ancient myth and modern science and the persisting aboriginal immersion of human life and spirit with all other parts of natural world.

… they portray a natural world that is radically different from that the Western scientific universe. The myths describe a realm in which humans, animals, stars, planets, stones – in fact, all things that exist – have spirits.These spirits take part in and influence life in many ways. In a time long ago, the boundaries between worlds were fluid. Sky People came to earth and animals went to the sky in search of adventure, game, or fire. There was an easy flow between the two arenas and things that now might be considered impossible took place.

(Miller, *Stars of the First People,,* 2)

It was actually not the circumpolar stars but the seasonal stars that played so important a role for planning activity in the literal round of gathering, hunting, and fishing in each of the successive ecological pockets within the large dispersed area used to support each band within each nation.

While to some extent food foragers will exploit their resources circumstantially as they occur, the most effective use of natural resources is to know what is most available when and where – migrating caribou in the far north for example, returning salmon in the Pacific Northwest, or berries in the eastern Woodlands. Although astronomical observations are not the only nor necessarily the best guarantors for marking such cycles, in their annual regularity they provide a valuable gauge or check point. (Fabian, *Patterns in the Sky,* 10)

The appearance of the constellation Orion marked the beginning of Fall, the hunting of the migrating wildfowl and the gathering of ripe berries. When Sirius.brightest in the heavens, rose above the eastern horizon at the end of October it signalled the time for the winter hunt for meat and fine fur. Spring, time for beaver and muskrat, was marked by the reappearance of the Great

Bear's lair in the Northern Crown. Directly overhead the fishing camps of summer was the Summer Triangle of Deneb, Vega, and Altair. Such signals as these of the changes of seasons in our provincial north were also familiar to and used by those in the early fur trading posts who must not only gather furs but also the provisions to sustain their commerce through the year. For later teachers and children too walking or riding to and from country school in late sunrise and early dark these changing asterisms signalled the passage of the school year, at least until the locked evening doors of residential schools and the enclosed yellow buses travelling to consolidated schools shut out the winter night stars.

e. The story of the rocks

Northern Alberta took its present form gradually after the slow withdrawal of the Laurentian ice shield about ten millennia ago at the end of the Wisconsian glaciation. Before that northern Alberta was locked in part of the earth's crust which, after the breakup of Pangea, the Pre-Cambrian supercontinent, and having drifted for half a billion years northwest from tropical oceans to northern seas, had just emerged from three ice ages extending over a million years. The oldest remaining part of that ancient crust, with surface rock from the Acasta River in the NWT that can be dated to 3.9 billion BCE, is the Great Canadian Shield, lying saucer-like around Hudson Bay. Only in the northeast corner of Alberta, around Fort Chipewyan, does it appear at the surface of our province. From there it slips downwards in a southwesterly direction until on our western edge it is two miles below the Rockies. This means that northern Alberta is not the place to mine for industrial minerals trapped in the ancient rocks of the Shield. It does mean that it is the place to look for the organic fuel to power the processing of these minerals – coal, oil, gas, and oil-sands – and the fossils of the fabulous animals that sustained themselves on the lush vegetation that became these sources of carbon energy. Such abundance of plants occurred naturally around the edges of primordial seas. It was Alberta's fate to be the northern leg of the seaway of North America through which , over half a billion years, sluiced the waters of the Arctic, Pacific, and Gulf of Mexico. It is northern Alberta's good fortune that in the Middle Cambrian seas there formed an immense headland. It was shaped like a triangle lying on its side with its base in the northeast, its head in the Peace River Block of British Columbia, and its sloping sides extending from Grande Prairie to Fort McMurray on south and through Keg

River and Rainbow Lake to the north.(Stelck," The Record of the Rocks"). This Peace River Arch, though eroding over the aeons of time, formed the water's edge at which plants grew, died and decomposed and compressed into the coal of Grande Cache and the creekside mines of the Smoky River and its tributaries that served early Grande Prairie. It also provided the shallows, less than one hundred feet, in which sunlight enabled Cladopera and Amphipora corals to grow to trap oil and gas in their hollows. In waters to the east the oil seeped down to the sands laid down by erosion from the Shield itself. In the last eras of the second last geologic age, the Cretaceous, northwest Alberta was the only place still above waters flowing in from the Gulf of Mexico, and thus the location of a species of dinosaur not found elsewhere in the province, Pachyrhinosaurus Lakustai, named for a Grande Prairie teacher and amateur palaeontologist who would take his students on field-trips to local creeks in search of fossils.

About 65 million years ago came the catastrophe of the planetary winter caused by the asteroid impact on the Yucatan peninsula, evidenced by the presence of a thin band of iridium ash found at the same geologic level throughout the earth. In the long Tertiary period of the Cenozoic age that precedes our earliest records of humanoid life northern Alberta, then part of the whole western seaboard of North America, ground against the Pacific plate. The pressure pushed up the edge of land to form coastal mountains and then forced them to march eastwards to become the Rockies that in their northernmost reaches form the western edge of our provincial north. In fact the whole province was forced upwards and grassland began to replace lush deltas. By the time of the transition from the Tertiary to the Quaternary era, about 1.5 to 2 million years BCE, a lowering of planetary temperatures was already evident and the glaciations in the northern hemisphere produced a land bridge. The early species of camels and horses vanished into Asia and in their place came straight tusked elephants, giant bison, and mammoths from Asia. In time they were fated to be hunted to extinction by the earliest humans who came into the heart of the American continent in the last 10,000 years BCE. They came because the land was supporting flora and fauna after the retreat of the ice through northern Alberta around 12,000 BCE. The natural history of our region has been shaped by the residue and the sculpting of this last agonizingly slow scraping withdrawal, whose sound, could it be accelerated, would be like fingernails across a blackboard. The glacier had gathered up all surface soil like the edge of a

carpenter's woodplane as it advanced south and now the streams of its retreating melting concave edge released this wastage of rock and other material to drop in its wake.

Some time after about 18,000 years ago, the climate began to warm, signaling the end of the Ice Age. Gradually, ice began to melt, producing huge volumes of meltwater that often formed large lakes. These lakes were ponded along the margins of the remaining ice-sheet, which still blocked the west-east trending river valleys. Water flowing into the lakes often carried large amounts of silt and clay from the rocks that had been ground up by the ice. This sediment was deposited on the lakes' floors. These lacustrine (lake) deposits still blanket the landscape in many areas, such as in the Peace River district near Grande Prairie…. (Beaudoin " Looking Beyond the Surface")

Through this broken rock material the new mountain rivers had to carve their way from the annual snowcaps and glacial melt still remaining in the Cordillera. The two dominant river basins of northern Alberta are the Athabasca and the Peace. The Athabasca had the easier task as the advancing and retreating glacier cut a smooth U shaped valley floor through which running water could work its way in smooth twisting gravity fed flow from headwaters to mouth. Differences in bedrock meant tributaries could sometimes cut more dramatic gorges in their need to fall down to that valley floor, seen strikingly in the deep canyons cut by the Maligne in Jasper Park, as it worked its way down to the Athabasca. The greatest of such canyons lies in the upper reaches of the Peace River before it reaches our western provincial border. The origins of the Peace actually lie west of the longtitudinal line of the Great Divide but its natural inclination was eastwards. In its way lay a vast pile of rock left by the glaciers, blocking its path and forcing it to cut a canyon over twenty miles in length through which it drops full several hundred feet in a continuous roar. The gravitational course followed by each enables us, without aid of the surveyor's theodolite, to identify the basic elevations of our north. The Athabasca flows steadily northeastward until almost at the eastern border of our province, whereat it turns sharply northward. The more northerly Peace , after leaving its canyon and crossing into Alberta, moves steadily in a northeasterly direction until it joins with the Athabasca in the largest freshwater delta in North America, the Peace-Athabasca Delta, the Eldorado sought by the European fur

traders two hundred years ago. From thence their joined waters flow north to the Arctic, via the Slave River, Great Slave Lake, and the Mackenzie River, providing northern Alberta with an orientation different from the rest of the province, where central rivers flow to Hudson Bay and southern rivers finally join the Gulf of Mexico through the Missouri River system. These river systems were the main travel routes of northern Alberta in historic time. It was prehistoric time that laid down such soils as there were. The most ancient rivers of northern Alberta, flowing off the edges of the triangle of the Peace River Arch, left deposits in the Peace Country along the southwest and smaller pockets off the northwest edge around Fort Vermilion and La Crete. To these were added the seabed deposits remaining around such relics as Lesser Slave Lake of the glacial Lake Connell from 10,000 BPE. Such soils are classified as Thin Black Soil, good but less desirable than the Black Soil region around Edmonton (Green, "Mountains and Plains", 89). The rest of the north is Gray Wooded soil, whose limit of support is mixed deciduous and evergreen forest in which muskegs and sedge bogs frequently occur. Muskeg or peat bog is organic soil that is unstable due to extremely high water content. The water is stagnant, the air above it is insect infested, and there is a lack of abundant, attractive vegetation. The constant frost heaving of the soil in winter can produce swathes of black spruce woodland that looks drunk as the trees sway this way and that. To keep in mind this image of the topography of northern Alberta, left by our geology, with these two great river systems, the Athabasca and the Peace, flowing northeastward and a vast triangle of northern forest lying beween them, with its head in the southwest on the 55th parallel and its base stretching along the western bank of the north flowing Athabasca from the 55th to the 60th, with pockets of agricultural possibility generally confined to the western portion, is to grasp the possibilities and limitations that geology and nature provided for the human development of northern Alberta.

f. The dark northern woods

We now usually call it the boreal forest. In the past the usual name was northern woods or northern forest. They mean the same thing since the word 'boreal' comes from the Greek name for the Goddess of the North Wind. At first, of course, as the Laurentide ice shield retreated, the landscape was essentially tundra – as in our further, geologically younger more northern regions today. At first came the poplar and woody shrubs such as willow. Then about 11,000 years ago

the first conifers began to form a belt along the edge of the retreating ice, their seeds probably carried by southeast winds from the interior of the continent.

In time, the area occupied by the spruce extended northwards and by at least 9,000 years ago, we can discern a broad region of coniferous forest, the fore-runner of the boreal forest that occupies so much of northern Alberta today. (Beaudoin, " Looking Beyond the Surface)

It stretches in a continuous band around all the northern nations of the earth, between roughly the 55th and 65th parallels, with treeless tundra to the north and the patchwork of groves within parkland, steppes and prairies to the south. Northern Alberta is part of this great northern coniferous forest, one of the world's greatest ecosystems. In the absence of corresponding extensive forested belt in the southern hemisphere – there is just not the same amount of land mass available - this immense northern belt of green, when combined with the dense equatorial forests, of middle latitudes, acts as earth's lungs. Unlike the wide range of plant and animal species found in Amazonia, however, the sub-arctic climate of the northern forest supports a much narrower mosaic of flora and fauna. These limits result from the stresses of climate and limitations of soil: the stress of long, snowy winters; the stress of a short growing season punctuated by repeated forest fires from summer lightening storms, along with the imperfect drainage as one moves eastward and the impermeable rock of the Shield comes closer to the surface leaving shallow muskeg and bog surmounted by crazy angled black spruce unable to gain a secure anchor. It is the profile of these spires of spruce, pine and fir silhouetted against lingering summer sunsets that is the iconic image of this region.

g. Prairies of the northwest

These prairies are the anomaly amidst the northern woods and it was they which drew Euro-Canadian settlers northwards in the last great homestead land rush in North America. The Peace River Country of northwestern Alberta, crossing the border into northeastern British Columbia, where it is known as the Peace River Bloc, is an immense area of parkland set within the global band of boreal forest that wraps around the global sub-arctic.. The climatic origin of these pockets of grassland may lie in the westward jog of Alberta north of the 55th parallel and its openness to both dry Chinooks from the west through low mountain passes and to dry air from

the north down the Mackenzie Valley. These beginnings were expanded outwards by the grazing of wood buffalo. The aboriginal peoples extended these natural prairies by firing the bush from time to time in the spring, until the soil no longer supported trees and eventually formed natural pastures. where hunters could harvest the wood buffalo which grazed on the new growth. The importance of these areas of open grassland (prairies) in attracting homesteaders is reflected in the names of original agricultural settlements: Grande Prairie, High Prairie, Paddle Prairie, John D'or Prairie, Sunset Praire, Pouce Coupe Prairie and so on.

Such prairies, certainly of any significant dimension, do not exist in the eastern portion of the provincial north. This difference, above all, was to create a different balance of Native and non-Native populations and consequent character of life and economic activity between the western and eastern portions of northern Alberta that can still be detected in the rhythm of schooling today.

h. Animal aboriginals

Northern Alberta has nurtured its own unique realm of flora and fauna, with emphasis on adaptations for travel and energy conserving behavior, including hibernation, along with exploitation of such micro ecosystems as flourish in the short summers. It was the intelligence for such adaptations that also characterized the first and continuing human inhabitants, for there are more than the customary southern seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter in the boreal forest. Break-up and freeze-up are micro seasons on their own and may be regarded as the seasonal bookends of the major adaptations displayed by plants and animals to turn winter's months long blanket of snow from threats into opportunities for survival. The heat and moisture that continues to escape all winter from the ground beneath snow banks creates a delicate lattice work of hollows in the bottommost layers of snow ("pukak" is the far northern aboriginal term), which enable small mammals – mice and voles - to excavate tunnels in which they may have protection from foxes on the surface whose keen hearing can locate the voles through deep snowbank

. … the fox stopped, sat down, and cocked his head. He had entered a zone of delicious smells – voles, whose scent rose all about him. There, a faint squeak, then another. The fox rose slowly, slowly; daintily he extended one front foot. He eased forward until the squeaks seemed to come from directly below.

Then he crouched and jumped high in the air, all four feet tucked together. His full weight thumped on to the crust, which cracked. The fox dug frantically, using his teeth to loosen the slabs of crust and his forefeet to toss them backwards. As he dug through the snow the pukak loosened and flowed into the hole, nearly covering him. The fox snorted and shook his head to free himself of the cold crystals. Another avalanche of pukak crystals caused him to scramble hastily back to the surface….Under such a shifting, hair-trigger mass the voles were safe.(Pruitt, *Wild Harmony,* 38-39)

The "qali" snow that drapes the branches of the spruce and with its cumulative weight carries the outer tips of its lower branches down to the ground, leaves a protected hollow bowl , a snow cave of insulated space at the base for the eponymous snowshoe hare, most fitted by evolution for travel across the snows of the northern forest. Its enormous hind paws, their flesh and bone dimensions almost doubled by long stiff hairs, enable it to almost float over the snow. In nature's balance of prey and predator, the lynx also has disproportionately large paws, not two but four. Ernest Thompson Seton, one of the trilogy of Viljalmur Gustaffson and Grey Owl who were celebrity naturalists in Canada's north in the first half of last century, vividly described how their fates were intertwined in the boreal forest.

The lynx lives on rabbits, follows the rabbits, thinks rabbits, tastes like rabbits, increases with them, and on their failure, dies of starvation in the unrabbited woods. (Quoted, Bastedo , *Falling for Snow,* 98)

Conversely, the aboriginal people of the boreal forest could talk of ‘rabbit starvation’, not from a diet without rabbit, but a diet of only rabbit in a winter in which the larger wapiti elk and moose could not be found, ungulates whose carcase contained fat as the rabbit did not.

The main ungulates of the northern woods are the moose and the elk. ‘Wapiti’ is the aboriginal word for elk, meaning ‘white rump’. The rutting call of the male, an assertive scream that is called ‘bugling’ is one of the heart racing sounds of the Fall in the boreal forest. The term ‘elk’ is of European origin for the same animal found in the northern forests of that subcontinent. The wapiti elk is second in size only to the moose, the iconic ungulate of the boreal forest, huge of bulk and carrying an awesome rack of flattened antlers. The nose of the moose is magnificent in its homeliness and in its efficiency for scent and as a heat exchanger in the exertion of solitary travel in the winter snow. The spaces within Its thick snout act as a natural heat exchanger between the heat of its blood and the freezing cold of the air.(19. Bastedo 99-100) It travels as we travel; it wades through the snow. Its legs are very long and are so articulated that they operate, piston-like, almost straight up and down. In contrast, the short-legged wood bison uses its numbers to plough through the snow tramping stolidly in a follow-the- leader technique as it seeks out the clearings and small natural prairies found in the northern woods and preserves them , along with the wapiti elk, by feeding on young aspen growth at the edges. (Fuller, “ Winter in the Northern Forest”)

The most common trees around them in the boreal forest are conifers: cone bearing spruce, fir and pine that keep their needles and cone bearing larch that keep their cones but lose their needles. Of these the spruce and fir are the climax species. Perhaps the most remarkable example of arboreal adaptation to ensure regeneration midst the extremes of boreal conditions is the serotiny of the crookbacked Jack Pines and straightstanding Lodgepole Pines. Their cones imprison their seeds with a seal that can only be broken by the temperatures of a forest fire. The pine are generally found in mixed stands along with poplar and birch. These mixed forests display glorious yellows in the fall midst the prevailing evergreens. The trembling aspen with their flattened petioles attaching leaves at right angles to stem respond rustlingly to the slightest

breeze and thus produce the most distinctive background voice of the summer forest. The white birch, along with its natural beauty, provides the easily detached bark that provided the skin for the boreal forest's most beautiful contribution to transportation – the birch bark canoe. The skin but not the stitching. That comes from the roots of pine or spruce and it is probably the gathering, peeling, softening and splitting of this fastening material that is the most time consuming part of the construction.

The forest floor impedes passage with its entangling sucker growth. All the aspens and poplars spread by means of these root suckers, new stems appearing up to a hundred feet from the parent tree. This results in trees that deserve more respect than they usually receive, since they far outdate the unquestionably majestic Douglas fir, creating large colonies whose duration as continuously regenerating products of single seedlings may exceed any boreal human settlement by thousands of years. Berry bearing shrubs - especially cranberry, raspberry, blueberry and saskatoon - are most common in deciduous stands, which tend to let in more sunlight in spring and fall, before and after foliage. They are found especially in clearings and on open slopes, though they can also survive in the more acidic soils found below conifers. They lent themselves to many methods of presentation and were easily preserved by drying. Medicinal plants such as ratroot, the all-purpose 'aspirin', and Labrador tea, the cleansing purgative, were available on the forest floor and in the shallows of muskeg pond.

Where the water lies deeper to form lakes are found the last of the key food sources for the aboriginal round, along with large ungulates and berries, the fish of summer and fall. In the deep lakes, Athabasca above all, the cold water lake trout were to be found and the lake whitefish. In lakes of more moderate depth, where summer sun can warm the waters are found abundant perch and walleye, along with the voracious northern pike. In the rivers and their tributaries are found the native species of rainbow and cutthroat trout and the trout-like Arctic grayling. Sometimes coincidentally by these rivers, but always by lakes were and still are found the aboriginal communities of northern Alberta. The aboriginal peoples of the boreal forest are sometimes called 'people of the moose', in recognition of the most bountiful of all the sources of food

energy available to and sought by them, but another, humbler, species might also be considered. Of all the parts of the traditional round it was the fish caught and dried in the fall that provided the most fundamental and reliable food source. Just ask the children in the residential schools what was most commonly served.

Winter is a time of silence in the boreal forest, causing Jacques Cartier to first refer to our northern forests as 'the vegetable kingdom' which sat still and soundless in its vastness. But not absolute silence, for some birds remain through the cruelest season. The bravest is the smallest. The little black capped chickadee.'s *chick-a-dee-dee-dee* call can be heard year round. The largest is the loudest. What a contrast is the harsh *quork-quork* of the common raven. Glorified in aboriginal cultures worldwide, the raven is perhaps the most intelligent of birds. On the very coldest of days he sits watching high in the tall conifers or walks confidently with his heavy swaying gait along the ground. The boldest and most mischevious of all the birds that remain in our north throughout our winter is the gray jay, the bird with greatest jutzpah in seizing any opportunity for feeding. Their very name tells us how well known they have been and remain to all humans who enter their territory, from the earliest aboriginals to the most recent fall camper in the boreal forest. The popular name given to them by Europeans, 'whiskey jack', is a corruption of the original aboriginal name, 'wisahcejak', the hero, or more properly, anti-hero of countless traditional tales told through the long nights of winter in the family shelter.

i. Man and Nature in the provincial north

The 'corruption' of an aboriginal naming of the whisky-jack might be taken as a metaphor to represent an alteration in mental relationship with the natural world of northern Alberta that occurred with the development of intensive agriculture and resource extraction (does one include or make an exception for the fur trade?) in the last one hundred years. Intensive agriculture means radically changing the natural environment to serve only one species, humans. The aboriginal foragers and hunters had periodically used fire to halt and restart the process of natural regeneration so as to encourage berries and the young plant growth preferred by large ungulates. Agriculture , in order to hugely increase the yield from one single plant species,

requires stopping the natural regeneration altogether and keeping it at bay, indeed regarding it as the enemy.

As humans began to reshape their environments in ways that suited them better, they may have experienced a growing sense of separation between the "natural" and " human" worlds. The sense of community between humans and their environment, which is still apparent in modern foraging communities, probably diminished in agricultural communities. It would have been replaced by a sense of alienation – a sense that the natural world was at best indifferent to humans, and at worst positively hostile. (Christian, *Maps of Time,* 242)

Thus human beings may always have done to their natural environment at cost to themselves.

Yet, sometimes against our will, the environment seeps into us until we find that it has become part of who we are, even those of us who came from elsewhere. Gabrielle Roy, famous Franco-Manitoban author, captured this in the final passages of her 1962 novel *The Hidden Mountain.* She dedicated the novel to painter of the Canadian north, Rene Richard, emigrant to Canada and northern Alberta. Pierre, the painter and main character finds his way to Paris to paint. Taken by a friend to find a suitable studio, he surprises his friend by choosing an attic with only a skyiight.

… through a single skylight there filtered a glow, so far off and uncertain that one might think it the last glimmering of dusk. " Just about the daylight of the Upper Mackenzie, during the month of October," said Pierre in a dreamy tone of voice … he lit the first fire he had ever lit in Paris. He wondered if its smoke could be seen in the sky as it would be seen from very far off on the low plains of his Canadian land … He listened intently. As though to give him pleasure, the wind that he was convinced must have come from afar rumbled over the roof close above him. By the strange happiness that took hold of his heart, he understood how much he had missed the wind of

the North, the blowing snow, the tempestuousness of the storm and of nature. (Roy, *The Hidden Mountain,* 163)

Like stories of Canadian soldiers stationed in the English countryside to await invasion of Europe in World War II discovered one night standing face up to the sky wherefrom heavy snowflakes were falling, with tears running down their faces at the memories of home.

2.

Teaching in a northern urban setting: life in a northern town

a. **Urban midst the largeness**

It may seem counter-intuitive to begin a survey of teaching conditions in northern Alberta with a study of urban settings, but it should not be so. The region, in all its expansiveness, is anchored demographically by the cities of Grande Prairie in the west and Fort McMurray in the east, both over 50,000 population. Running west of a north-south line through the region ie the smaller centres of High Level (3-4k), Peace River (6k), High Prairie (2-3k), and Slave Lake (6k). This western demographic emphasis largely reflects the continuing effect of the opening of the northern agricultural frontier in the Peace River zone making up the western region of northern Alberta beginning in the second decade of the 20th century. The eastern region, dominated by Native population, continued in the last stages of traditional trapping-hunting culture until the first stirrings of Fort McMurray with the Great Canadian Oil Sands venture by Suncor in 1967.

In 1985 the English folk rock group, The Dream Academy, recorded the song, " Life in a Northern Town", that was to reach #7 on the US Billboard Top 100 in 1986. Set in the particular context of declining industrial towns of northern England, it caught the sense of being in an eddy, a continual slow round circling the same spot, off to the side and outside of the strong main currents, whose energy and constant newness were siren-like.

And the morning lasted all day

All day

And through an open window came

Like Sinatra in a younger day

Pushing the town away.

No pop tune would reach the top 10 chart unless it echoed something widespread in human, especially adolescent, experience – the sense of 'anywhere but here' that is part of growing up in any community outside the metropolitan centres which represent the only apparent valid life experience for many young people. As such it particularly captures the knowledge of being outside the mainstream that is an unavoidable part of all northern communities in Canada, This knowledge can become something aching among the young, observable in the adoption of Afro-American inner city dress and music by adolescents on isolated northern reserves and on the streets of Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. It also carries the whiff of communities that once were bustling with the activities of an earlier economy and now are symbolized in our provincial north in the daylong presence of old men sitting on the bench outside the Northern Store in Fort Chipewyan, watching the come and go of modest traffic in the traffic-light-less main street of a community that was the first and thus remains the oldest 'town' in Alberta. At the same time it is not the whole truth. It misses the self-confident and aggressive growth of certain communities in northern Alberta that have become service centres for energy exploration in oil, gas and coal as well as the forest industry. It misses the farmer/cowboy character of life in now century-old communities born within the homesteading movement to this last 'delayed' agricultural frontier in North America, the Peace Country. It misses the combination of all three of these elements of aboriginal, roughneck, and country-boy to be found together in these northern communities, along with constant presence of representatives of metropolitan bureaucratic, legal, law-enforcement, educational, and religious institutions headquartered in the dominant ecumene of southern Canada.

b. Measuring northerness

The use of this concept of ecumene to analyze the nature of urban communities in our provincial north, particularly in regard to their experience of schooling, is borrowed from the Canadian geographer, Louis Hamelin. He developed a set of indices to measure degrees of 'nordicity' . (Hamelin, *Canadian Nordicity,* 71-74) His scale measured not only annual average temperatures

and snowfall, but also types and duration of access (for example, Fort Chipewyan is accessible by land vehicle for only 3-4 months a year when a winter ice bridge is constructed across the delta, but has daily air service), and types of economic activity. The maximum number of 'polar units' he assigned was 1000 for the most isolated settlements on the Arctic islands, with 200 being used as his boundary between the 'North' and the rest of Canada. That 'rest', the permanenty settled southern communities of Canada, containing all the political, economic, cultural, communications headquarters of mainstream Canadian life, he called the 'ecumene'. From the ecumene close to Canada's southern border, he projected broadly latitudinal stages of nordicity: Near North, Middle North, Far North, and Extreme North. Applying these to Alberta in 1979, he assigned all of our provincial north to Middle North – except for the most settled region of the South and Central Peace Country, which he included in the Near North.

c. Grande Prairie city

In his 1979 edition Hamelin actually included a measure for Grande Prairie itself. Grande Prairie was assigned a value of 198 Polar Units, just on the edge of his cut-off for 'northerness'. (Hamelin, *Canadian Nordicity,* 71-74) In the 1970s Grande Prairie was changing from its role as service centre for a surrounding region of 'petit bourgeois' (valuing of schooling due to emphasis on 'respectability' associated with ownership of property, propriety of speech and dress and manners) independent farmers to service centre for an increasingly working class (early school leaving, aggressive practice of non-correct speech patterns, dress, recreation) population employed in plywood mills in the 60s, pulp mills in the 70s, and the first oil and gas plays of the 80s. In step with that its community festivals were changing from annual regional agricultural fairs, chautauquas, music festivals and horse rodeos to annual Monster truck rodeos, rock concerts and beerfests. It was changing from a version of an archtypical western farm town to a version of an archtypical northern forestry and oil rig town. Each of these stages of change has affected the classrooms of this northern town; each stage has created a 'type' of student; students representative of each category of 'growth' can be seen in each classroom today. The representation is not equally distributed among all the urban schools, however. The elementary schools tend to be located in discrete socio-economic neighbourhoods and thus can differ in school populations and therefore school culture. In the junior high grades it is possible to observe

rather in the manner of the confluence of the Blue and the White Nile rivers, the different elements that coalesce for Social Studies but separate for Orchestra vs Shop. Since our northern cities are much smaller than cities to the south, then generally there is only one high school for the public and Catholic districts respectively, serving all student populations of differing academic ability and interest, and reflecting differing socio-economic life styles. This is in contrast to a range of high schools in Edmonton, for example, each with a particular focus – academics, the arts, foreign language immersion, for example. Historically the public high school is by far the older. Until 1969, Grande Prairie High School was an academic school, with a school culture of 'betterment' and 'propriety'. In that year it accessed federal funding to build a new trades wing and changed to a Composite High School. It took some time – at least a decade – for change to be apparent. Children of independent and long established farming families have now moved to the County school established within the city boundaries; as a type of student from homes where schooling/education is valued, they have generally been replaced by offspring of professionals and managers of large companies and public service agencies as Grande Prairie has expanded its role as federal and provincial as well as municipal centre. As of 2010, the school has over 1500 students and the student body accurately reflects the altered sociology of the city.

d. Northern urban students as 'millenials'

Grande Prairie City has grown more than four-fold in population since 1979, from 12,000 to over 50,000. The media connections for all communities in the provincial north to the dominant ecumene have accelerated even more, since the first television reception was received in Grande Prairie in 1962. So powerful has such electronic messaging become that it is appropriate to begin a reflection on the possible impact upon the nature of the schooling experience arising from location in Alberta's northern urban communities, by considering whether 'global' generational characteristics should be used instead of local sociologies to profile northern youth today. Considerable attention has recently been given to portraits of the common values/behaviours/cultural reference points that characterize members of the generation born in the 1980s, sometimes called 'the millennial generation'. According to some observers the world view (with the double meaning of 'global membership' as well as 'global outlook') of this

generation includes the following elements: ambitious/high achievers, confident and good self-image, protected and sheltered (car safety seats, riding helmets), accustomed to being in teams and being connected through an increasing range of electronic social media, accustomed to a high level of personal consumption and being valued as customers and clients, very scheduled and used to operating within a clear set of rules designed for their benefit, trustful of adults, including parents, less open to broadcast messages vs pursuing individual interests through podcasts/websites. (Moore, "They've never taken a swim and thought about Jaws").

The question is whether this portrait of the mental world of youth fits the youth of a small northern city like Grande Prairie and particularly what might be implications for school and classroom of similarities and differences between the two. It is worth noting some demographic characteristics of northern Alberta in general and Grande Prairie in particular that are somewhat different from national and provincial patterns. The 2001 census noted that there were some marked differences: median age was lower, median family income was higher, birth rate was higher, gender ratio was skewed to male, age pyramid with larger proportion of young groups especially in Native communities, higher levels of employment in resource industries and lower levels of completed schooling. (McaAlpine, "Demographics in the Peace") This may be what one would have expected. It also means that the general 'feminization' of schools, assumptions about pupil 'readiness' for formal learning, and interest in the academic levels necessary for entry into professional careers may need to be restrained.

Schooling in Grande Prairie reflects the educational values of a small northern city where the ethos of resource, especially forestry and energy related, industries has been added to a diminishing role as farm service centre and continuing role as professional/government service centre and expanding role as retail hub for the entire northwest Alberta and northeast British Columbia. Other urban school settings in northern Alberta reflect differing balances between these elements. All of them are affected by the differing balances of Native –non-Native populations.

e. Sociologies of a northern town

It requires judgement to assess how far standard sociological accounts of northern towns should be applied to the urban settings of northern Alberta. This may be particularly true of the role of women.

The gendered dimensions of the North have been the subject of little historical scrutiny... As is the case in other fields of Canadian history, there has been " a historiographical obsession", as one scholar has termed it, with the urban. I would argue even more specifically that there has been a concentration on the urban south..... the geographical focus has remained for the most part on the country's key metropolitan centres and their immediate environs.... Altogethe, this historical literature has tended to reinforce rather than problematize the portrayal of the provincial North as a "man's country" and even more specifically as a Euro-Canadian man's country. (Forestell, " Women, Gender, and the Provincial North")

Resource towns in particular tend to be located in Canada's provincial norths and the more a community tends toward being a creation of non-agricultural resource industry – most typically forestry since the 1960s and energy(including coal) since the 1980s – then the non-Native (this is an important qualification) population tends to be skewed to a slight majority of transient younger males by number and strongly reflective of male values in community life. The gender roles tend to be fairly distinct and can be expected to be reflected in the classroom. One study of the role of women in traditionally male dominated northern forestry and mining resource towns in northern BC found that most were wives, with their status determined by their husband's work and income. They were regarded by the resource companies as a stabilizing force in the community, playing a supportive role to their husbands. As couples they reported being attracted by the higher wages enabling increased purchases, but that both the natural and the social environment was harder on (offered less to) women than men. Females perceived the environment as remote and isolated, lacking the facilities of a city along with absence from family and friends. Most reported that their physical home environment was very similar to a southern single-family subdivision. There were accounts of boredom and loneliness; a rapid turnover of friends due to the mobility of the working population tended to reduce the willingness over time to make emotional effort at relationships. There was frustration over limited daycare facilities to enable work outside the home. Insofar as this increased the tendency to find personal identity linked to their children, there were concerns over the rapid turnover of

teachers and of medical personnel. In general women had more negative images of northern communities than men, along with frequent statements that they were ' a good place to raise kids'. It is important to recognize that defining non-Native male culture, particularly as it may affect the values and attitudes in the classroom, is as problematic as the analysis of non-Native female, although one study of male working-class culture in northwestern Ontario was fairly definite in its depiction of the life-view of the working-class male in the provincial north.

Working-class anti-intellectualism.... questions the assumption that some kinds of knowledge are more valuable than others, that formal education of certain kinds necessarily confers greater use value upon one's labour. It is based on the view that the exchange value of certain kinds of knowledge and the trappings of that knowledge, such as degrees, are out of proportion to its actual use value.... The stereotype of the professor who is pathetically incompetent in any practical activity has wide currency among the Boys.(Dunk, " It's a Working Man's Town", 40-141)

When such views on the value – or lack thereof – of formal learning among adult working-class males are set alongside the frustrations of fulfilment reported among wives, then one might expect the more feminine values of the classroom, in terms of expected behaviours and values, to create an even greater gender difference in non-Native student responsiveness in urban schools in our provincial north.

f. Northern urban Native

It has been important to this point to use the term non-Native in order to not silence by inclusion the separate experience of two other urban groups – aboriginals and new immigrant visible minorities. The aboriginal experience is largely one of marginalization, self-imposed and resulting largely from the widespread prejudice encountered in the overwhelmingly non-Native urban settings. Hugh Brody's account of setting out on a visit to town (in this case, Fort St. John in northern B.C. in the 1970s) still resonates.(Brody, *Maps and Dreams,* 136-145) The excitement of the packed pick-up leaving the dirt road for the paved highway, the sound of the car radio with its mixture of commercials, rock, country and gospel, its news items reflecting a faith in growth and 'progress', passing land new cleared with piles of poplar for burning, land

still waiting its first crop, entering the edges of town with its tangle of construction and temporariness with 'something better' always just about to come, a service centre and a boom town in its own right, where oil patch rubs shoulders with government managers and young hipsters. And then the truck pulls to a stop in town and excitement is replaced by wariness. The passengers separate to later meet at a predetermined spot on margins of town, meanwhile swinging between behaviours that are self-effacing so as not to attract attention and defiantly intentional exhibitions of behaviour that mirror the expectations they see on the faces of the dominant Other in the Other's town, particularly the working-class male.

Although their ideas about Natives are not straightforward, or always negative, the image of the Indian which appears most frequently in the Boys' discourse is generally derogatory. In jokes, off-hand comments, and general banter and gossip, the Indian stands for negative personality traits.... the image of the Indian women constitutes them as social inferiors, consonant with the perception of all women in this culture.... (Dunk, *It's a Working Man's Town,* 107,115)

In a complicated way such prejudiced views are not simply a form of racism, but a common element in self-definition as a 'northerner' living in a hinterland not understood by residents, particularly elites – which can include incoming schoolteachers –in the 'metropolitan' areas of the south. Disapproval of such views from such incomers is expected and then privately discounted as no more than to be expected. This can make it difficult for a teacher to change such views, since there is generally so little direct contestation. Yet the need to change such views gains urgency with the accelerating movement of FNMI students to urban schools in Alberta's north, particularly urban centres that are proximate to reserves – for example, High Prairie, High Level, and Beaverlodge.

g. Fort Mac: unique northern urbanity

This composite of the sociology of northern resource towns and the accompanying social values that impact the tone and expectations of the classroom is more applicable to northern Alberta's other large urban area, Fort McMurray, than to Grande Prairie. As Hamelin concluded when drawing the boundaries of his regions of 'nordicity', Grande Prairie and the Peace Country in general was something of a landscape anomaly in the northern forest – an immense region

containing prairies capable of supporting a farming economy and lifestyle that would and did support social values that were a northern extension of the mixed farming region of central Alberta. Writing in the 1970s Hamelin missed the significant addition of socio-economic layers of population growth associated with the forest industry and later energy exploration and extraction, but these did not replace but were added to the continuing farming heritage reaching back to the first homesteaders in the late 19th century. On the other hand, Fort McMurray became a genuinely urban centre relatively suddenly in the 1970s, after almost exactly a century as, and only as, a trans-shipment point on the Athabasca river, as its original name of Waterways implies. Fort McMurray thus has never had that 'settled' sense of Grande Prairie, even amidst the growth of lumber, plywood, pulp, oil, and gas extractive industries that have been added to the farming culture of the Peace country. It is the only 'city' in entire province that lacks an agricultural hinterland.

Although the history of the Fort McMurray region is an ancient one, it has been largely ignored. Authors who have written about the area tend to cast their eyes to the road ahead, discussing the future economic potential of the region to the exclusion of the past.... the perception of the modern occupants is consistent with that of the region's occupants throughout history. Although there are exceptions to any norm, the tendency was and still is to regard this environment as harsh and tyrannical wilderness that man must protect himself from in order to survive. CCaldwell, Zwerman, and Olmsted, *Perception of the Fort McMurray Environment Through Time,* 1)

The same authors reported on a survey in 1969, asking a sample of Fort McMurray residents to name the two things in their community most needing improvement. Access to cities in the south and communications were the two, which " suggests that one of the most obvious ways in which resident satisfaction with the quality of life in resource frontier communities may be mazimized is through the provision of regular opportunities to 'get out'". Another study in 1978 indicated that less than one-tenth of one percent of Fort McMurray's population at that time was born there, and that there was little inclination to identify themselves with the town. (Caldwell, Zwerman, and Olmsted, *Perception,* 58-60)

h. Teacher surveys of 'The Fort'

Twenty-five years later two separate studies provide quite different portraits of Fort McMurray from the perspective of teachers. The first, published in 2002, focussed on the stress of high costs of living, particularly accommodation, during the oil boom (a situation aggravated by the adoption of a common level of support for all school districts by the provincial government in an attempt at equity between districts, but doing a disservice to funding for teacher salaries amidst the boom conditions of Fort McMurray). In fact, that data was part of the information campaign during a teacher strike over these very issues.(Alberta Teachers Association, *The Fort McMurray Dis-Advantage*)The other, a series of interviews with recently arrived and long-serving teachers in Fort McMurray in 2004, left a much more positive impression of attitudinal openness undergirded by a strong economic base.(Harper, " Teachers' Narratives of Fort McMurray") It noted the effects on the classroom of this being basically a one-industry town, with 63% of the regional workforce employed by oil companies or by contractors doing work for the industry.

Shift work at the mines and a 30-60 minute bus ride each way puts significant stress on many families. Children spend more time with babysitters or on their own. Those with well-paid parents experience the material rewards that $100,000+ per year wages can bring. However, Mr. B says, " They don't see that people (their parents) have to work hard... "It is difficult to persuade students to work hard at school and learning when their parental and community role models are only seen around enjoying the toys that their large salaries have paid for. (Harper, "Teachers' Narratives of Fort McMurray", 31-*33*)

Yet the internal transience between rental properties that is often part of the early experience of newly arrived families often brings out the resilience of the young, with students more accustomed than most to accepting new arrivals. (Harper, "Teachers' Narratives of Fort McMurray", 34)

i. Peace River town

Perhaps Peace River town is the best indicator of the difference between the two larger communities of Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. It was founded as a warehouse settlement for the fur-trade in the 19th century, servicing trading posts up and down the Peace River. It stagnated with the decline of the fur-trade in the early 20th century, became something of a supply and administrative centre for incoming homesteaders until the railroad reached Grande Prairie in 1916, waited for an agricultural frontier to open up in the north Peace Country after World War II, experienced its first industrial woodpulp industry in the 1980s, and awaits the development of 'oil sands north' in the 21st century. Its much smaller population differs from Grande Prairie in lacking the significant homestead heritage and from Fort McMurray in still awaiting its abrupt transition from quiet historic river meeting-place to large scale brash extractive industry.

j. Northern Alberta's smaller towns

In northern Alberta there are two other kinds of small communities – the reserve community and another kind of village/rural community – the descendant of the traditional native/fur trade community – of which Fort Chipewyan, Fort Vermilion and Wabasca-Desmarais are the best examples .Although the study is now fifty years old, the work done by members of the Sociology and Anthropology Department of McGill University in 1961/1962 is still useful in considering the variety of types of settlement and the social organization of each type. (Fried, " Settlement Types and Community Organization in Northern Canada") While some of the isolated, exclusively technical stations and military bases associated with the creation of the Cold War Dew Line do not apply (though the most southern of these early-warning stations was located beside the fifty-year old Peace Country community of Beaverlodge), other categories do match long-existing, slow-changing communities of northern Alberta dating back more than a century to early stages of fur-trade and missionary activity in the region:

Outpost service settlement – composed of a Native community serviced by a small complement of government agents. Fort Chipewyan, Fort Vermilion, Wabasca, Kinuso

Serviced native enclave – small Native groups closely (symbiotically) attached to a larger white-dominated community and still mainly dependent on special government agents who give supervision and assistance. High Prairie, Grouard, Athabasca

Regional administrative centre – a base of operation for a series of government agencies containing besides its core of civil servants, satellite communities of independent whites and Natives. Slave Lake, High Level

The researchers made these observations about the sociology of these closely related kinds of community.

The white settlers seem to be separable according to three adaptive poses: (a) close social merging with the dominant civil service group; (b) maintaining separate old-timer ingroups; and (c) merging with the native and Metis social world.

The natives, similarly, show a variety of responses to life in settlements. The more conservative groups still maintain much of their older kinship organization, language, and behaviour patterns, even though their economy is based on wage labour and not on trapping. The younger group shows a special form of marginal subcultural adaptation that is neither aboriginal nor white in style. (Fried, "Settlement Types")

Aside from the problematic nature of the phrase '*marginal subcultural'*, it is quite remarkable how well these observations hold up after half a century.

The best research on crosscurrents of schooling in these smaller Native dominated northern communities has been done by Rosemary Foster and Tim Goddard. In 2002 they reported on a study conducted in two communities in northern Alberta were ethnoculturally diverse, containing predominantly First Nation populations with well established Metis and White minority population with historical influence beyond their numbers. One community had year round road access , while the other relied upon the river (and aircraft) for much of the year, with a winter road providing the only surface access. Both schools examined had elected to be part of the provincial system with greater expectations for community relevance than their southern counterparts. Despite this the major finding appeared to be a disconnect between the values being promoted by the school and the life values of the majority in the communities.

We found little congruence between the expectations of the professional educators and those of the community. All groups had their own understanding of the goals of the school. For community members, schools were simply there, a mandated institution to be endured. For many educators, their role was as pedagogical missionaries who recognized that the cause, while possibly just, was nonetheless lost. (Goddard and Foster, " Adapting to Diversity")

The sequence or relationship of cause and effect is difficult to disentangle. The schools did not have a high reputation in the community or even among the professional educators themselves. At the same time there was a notable lack of community involvement that quickly burned out the few who did volunteer. The widespread notion that the school was the responsibility of the teachers was widespread. This is the opposite of rural schools in predominantly Euro-Canadian farming areas of north, where the local population held strongly to the view that the school was the community and 'their's'. It is the same as the urban view that schools are to be run by professional educators. The difference between urban and isolated Native view of the school as the teachers' affair, lies in the very point noted by the researchers the congruence of cultural values between school and community in the urban setting and the discongruence here. In one case the hands-off approach is grounded in agreement with and respect for the aims of the school, in the other it represents disinterest based on disengagement from these aims which are derived from the dominant non-Native society.

It is apparent that the wider societal structure affects the institutional structure and culture of the school, and the processes within. (It is) assumed that the principal and the community share the values, mores, and beliefs on which the policies and actions of the wider society are based. In northern schools this is patently not the case. (Goddard and Foster, " Adapting to Diversity")

The single most grating way in which this disengagement can affect schooling is low or irregular attendance.

………placed responsibility for low student attendance in the parents. Talking of the students in her community, she said, "I don't think they're achieving. I don't think they're trying. Now it seems like the kids are home alone a lot. Once they get to be about 12 years of age, it's like they are their own 'bosses'. The parents just let them be"…..As a result of these haphazard

attendance patterns, many students missed a great deal of the prescribe curriculum, making it very difficult for the teachers. (Goddard and Foster, "Adapting to Diversity")

One of the key bridging opportunities appears to lie in language use within and by the school. The communities are anxious to have the young retain at least conversational skill in their indigenous languages, but the means to do this seem to fall impotently between the community and the school. The latter requires professional certification for teaching, while the former loses human resources with every passing of older members.

There's no language here, in the school, in the community. Even the elders hardly speak a language. They speak broken English, there's the odd one that could speak to you fluently in Chipewyan, and there's the odd one that could speak Cree fluently with you. But most of them can't speak anything properly. (Quoted, Goddard and Foster, "Adapting to Diversity")

The researchers came to a gloomy set of conclusions about the existing state of school-community relations in these northern sites, whose best hope lay in a radical revising of curricular content and stratagems.

The students …. lived in communities with money but no recreational facilities. They had easy access to drugs and alcohol but had to leave the community for employment or post-secondary education. They lived in homes that were often dysfunctional and where parenting skills were poorly developed. At school they followed a curriculum of limited relevance to their lives and experiences, which to a great extent ignored their language and culture. They wrote provincial exams that did not take into account their situation, their language, or their abilities. The findings of our study indicate that educators need to extend their horizon of understanding….. The current focus on covering the provincial academic curriculum to the exclusion of all else is symptomatic of the ongoing struggle for legitimacy and recognition that is taking place in northern schools. (Goddard and Foster, "Adapting to Diversity")

Yet effort, and successful effort, is made to provide schoolchildren in these northern communities with experiences , some similar to those of the south and others reflecting the dominant First Nation and Metis demographics of this region of the provincial north. Tim Johnston, Editor of the ATA Magazine, wrote in his Editor's Notebook column in October, 2010, about visiting schools located along the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake. He found an example

of a member of the Alberta Dog Program being used to assist autistic children, school-sponsored student travel to Europe, overflew the Driftpile First Nation Community School architecturally designed to reflect the shape of a feather, participated in a regional meeting of FNMI coordinators, dropped in on a demonstration of drum-making and fish scale art by community members, helped in food preparation for a school visit by elders, and was welcomed to a kindergarten class with a child's solemn handshake that contained all the grave courtesy of traditional Native culture. (Johnston, "Editor's Notebook")

There is much to be considered by all parties to this greatest of pedagogical challenges facing Canadian teacher education: increasing the effectiveness to themselves and others of our northern peoples.

3.

Your students' parents' memories: human history of northern Alberta

a. Indigene and Immigrant

There is always some tension between the 'indigenous' inhabitants of a place and those who choose to come. Ask any immigrant. Perhaps the best qualification for being genuine inhabitants of a place is a simply a deep sense of belonging to that place. There can be no doubt of that sense of connectedness to the land by Native people that was encountered by Justice Thomas Berger during the hearings in Native communities of the Mackenzie Valley during his Pipeline Inquiry in the early 1970s.

It is very clear to me that it is an important and special thing to be an Indian. Being an Indian means being able to understand and live with this world in a very special way. It means living with the land, with the animals, with the birds and fish, as though they were your brothers and sisters.... Without our land we cannot – we could no longer exist as a people. Richard Nerysoo (Quoted, Berger, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland,* 94)

Such bonding with place is underpinned by spiritual beliefs and traditional accounts about the origins of the group. Such are the stories of Turtle Island among the Algonquian peoples to whom the Cree belong and the oblique, left-handed stories of Wisakedjak, the trickster and flatterer who finally cajoled little muskrat to rescue from the water the pawful of earth that grew into the island for humanity.

At last they saw some bubbles coming up through the water. Wisakedjak reached down his long arm seized Muskrat, and pulled him up beside them. The little creature was almost dead, but against his breast his forepaws held a piece of the old earth. Joyously, Wisakedjak seized it, and in a short time he had expanded the bit of earth into an island..... Others say that the Creator made all things again.... He took from Wisakedjak all power over people and animals and left

him only the power to flatter and deceive. After that, Wisakedjak played tricks upon the animals and led them into much mischief. That is why the Indians tell many stories about him, to amuse themselves during the long winter evenings. (Clark, *Indian Legends of Canada*, 9)

In northern Alberta such story-telling probably began about 10,000 years ago. In the last one-hundredth part of that span, almost exactly one hundred years ago, the Canadian government opened the first land registry office in the Peace Country and started off the last land rush to the 'Last Best West', the northernmost agricultural frontier in Canada. Those Euro-Canadian homesteaders who came, by the Long Trail through Athabasca Landing and along the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake, by the Edson Trail north from the railhead as it approached the Rockies, and later by rail from Edmonton itself, also came to love this north country. A poem in the Peace River newspaper in 1932 by a woman in High Prairie expressed popular sentiments about the farming frontier.

When you arise in the morning before the lark, and your bedtime comes before it gets dark, but the man who will work can get a good start, Out where the north begins. (Quoted, Wetherell and Kmet, *Alberta's North,* 301)

As implied in these lines, the love of the Euro-Canadian homesteader for Alberta's north was importantly derived from the opportunity to create a larger life for self and family. The Aboriginal peoples, on the other hand, were to find the boundaries of their traditional lifestyle and freedoms diminished with a speed unexpected by all signatories to Treaty #8. Their's had been such a long and now an incredibly foreshortened human history.

b. Before European contact

In the absence of early humanoid remains in the Americas before 40K BCE, we presume that human groups moved into the northwest region of the continent, including the future northern Alberta, by a variety of routes and timings between 40K and 10K. Geologists differ somewhat in their estimate of the extensiveness and withdrawal of the western glaciers that were part of the Wisconsin Ice Age of that period. Anthropologists find clues to different possible cultural origins of settlement remains and speculate about those lost to us now beneath the western seaboard.

Almost all accounts begin at least with reference to the Beringian hypothesis of a corridor down from Alaska/Yukon along the eastern slope of the Rockies down which humans travelled from Asia down to southern regions and up which some of them returned to settle in the northern regions as the glaciers retreated, making the mixture of Algonkian and Athapascan speaking aboriginal peoples of today.

How did they make a go of it for the twelve thousand years between their coming and that of the Europeans? Never underestimate their intelligence – after all, the term for elders is '*inkontse'(those who know)*. They developed hunting techniques that were effective because they studied when the animals were most vulnerable, as when swimming across rivers or flightless before the fall, or most distracted, as when spawning. They identified and created a gathering round of ecological niches, especially berries. They created a large network of mutual aid and dependence. They created a sense of relationship with their environment, in which sacred ties between man and animal encouraged moral and mental qualities that aided success in the hunt by patience, courage, and forbearance.

These moral and mental qualities served well for a hunting-gathering (and later trapping) system of production, yet were to be somewhat at odds with the ethos of the European schooling that lay in wait for their young in later times. Take their cultural ethic of ' When the time is right', for example. Nothing is more evident to the hunter than that he must await the right conditions of sky, temperature, light and season. A calendar or a clock will not serve. Yet observe the essential synchronicity of a school timetable and the consequent emphasis on the virtue of punctuality, whatever the state of actual readiness to learn. But this lay in the future.

c. Stages of post-contact experience

The human history of northern Alberta since the first Native/non-Native contact in the late 17th century falls broadly into the following pattern: indirect effects of European fur-trade activity 1670-1778; major period of European fur-trade carried out by NWC, HBC 1778-1821; HBC consolidation and then competition with a variety of independent trader, leading to reconfiguration of Aboriginal traditional system of production to include cash income from and dependence on fur-trade 1778-1900; first stage of European missionary activity, along with first

inventorial surveys following Canada's acquisition of Rupert's Land, up to signing of Treaty #8 1874-1900; contrasting consequences of Treaty #8 for Native residents and non-Native homesteaders, one way of life eroding, the other consolidating 1900-1970; from 1970 to the present there has been remarkable new development in both communities. The first, for the non-Native community, is the increasing layering of forestry and energy related activity on top of the agricultural economy. The Native community has experienced re-growth in population, political profile, confidence and pride, including increasing control over schooling.

d. 1670-1778

Pre-contact, four Native tribes lived in northern Alberta. In the 17th century, the Beaver tribe occupied a large area - lower Peace, lower Athabasca, lower Clearwater. Slave tribe originally west of L Athabasca. Chipewyan east of L Athabasca and Slave R to Hudson Bay and north to Barrens. The Woodland Cree occupied the Hudson Bay region. Beginning in late 17th century the Cree used their middle-man position in fur-trade supplying furs and food for trading posts to acquire firearms used to push westwards. Eventually the Beaver were pushed out of the Clearwater R area towards the Peace River and Slave forced north down the Slave R to Great Slave L. Cree and Beaver clashed throughout the 18th century until a smallpox epidemic among Cree forced peace (from which the river received its name via Mackenzie), leaving the Beaver north of the Peace River and the Cree to the south.

e. 1778-1821

In 1778 Peter Pond built a trading post on the Athabasca R at west end of Athabasca Lake. This became the site of Fort Chipewyan, which along with Fort Vermilion further up the Peace River, became the first and oldest continually occupied European settlements in Alberta. These posts were established in the name of Montreal based fur trading companies that later consolidated into the Northwest Company. It was from this base that Alexander Mackenzie set out on his expeditions to the Arctic and the Pacific. Such a rich source of high quality furs brought the Hudson's Bay Company into the region and a fierce, occasionally violent, rivalry with the NWC took place, with the indigenous inhabitants being pulled into the competition. The greater depth

of the HBC finally forced the NWC to agree to an amalgamation within the larger company in 1821.

f. 1821-1871

The absorption of the Northwest Company in 1821 marked the beginning of a half-century of HBC dominance within and de-facto governance of northern Alberta under the 'Emperor of the North', George Simpson, governor of Canadian operations. His business rationalization of the role of Native trappers and hunters within the fur trade, previously carried on at a pace and scale where initiative lay largely in Native hands, accelerated the effects of the fur trade on Native life. Prior to contact they had congregated in large numbers. Their involvement in the fur trade, as hunters as well as trappers, appears to have importantly altered the hunting of buffalo to be found on the prairies and flats of the region.

Firearms and provision of supplies for trading posts and canoe parties decimated this staple food source by mid-19th century. Thereafter dependence on non-herd ungulates, especially moose, along with the necessary division of traditionally shared territory into separate trapping areas, caused disintegration of larger tribal society into smaller band and even family groups, with summer fishing camps as the remaining time for coming together in large numbers.
(Leonard et al, " Humans: Their Demographics, Employment, and Infrastucture")

g. 1871 – 1899

In this period the state apparatus of the new nation, Canada, having recently acquired the former operating territory of the Hudson's Bay Company, began to take systematic inventory of its new domain. Canadian expansionists sought to use the instruments of federal power to bring northern Alberta into the national vs fur trade sectoral economy. The National Geological Survey was now extended into former Rupert's Land and the National Land Survey was initiated. In 1882 northern Alberta became part of the 'unorganized' District of Athabasca. This was also the period when major churches began schooling missions in northern Alberta, marked particularly by the founding of Holy Angels boarding school in Fort Chipewyan in 1874. The North West

Mounted Police, established in 1873, established themselves at the access points into the provincial north to prevent alcohol being brought in. In 1897 Inspector Jarvis was authorized to organize an expanded patrol to report on conditions and make recommendations related to possible treaty.

The pressure for treaty came from a variety of sources. Reports of confrontations and violence between prospectors heading to the Klondike and Native trappers, advocacy of homestead opportunities by Frank Oliver, prominent within the federal Liberal party, and initial reports of mineral opportunities on the south shore of Great Slave Lake, all played a part. In addition, both the HBC and missionaries reported the breakdown of traditional patterns of subsistence among the Native population and the incidence of outright starvation.

> *The excessive game exploitation caused hunger in low periods of natural cycle of fauna. Income from trapping was also increasingly unstable with the increase in independent Iroquois trappers in the region. These conditions led to episodes of outright starvation and cannibalism….These conditions in turn increased vulnerability to disease, such as smallpox and periodic influenza. This was the background of calls from the Aboriginal people of northern Alberta for the material benefits of treaty in the early 1890s, calls resisted by the Government of Canada until the instability associated with prospectors travelling to the Klondike, along with reports of mineral resources south of Great Slave Lake led to arrangements being made for Treaty #8.* (Leonard et al.,"Humans")

h. Treaty #8 1899-1900

The motives for the Canadian government in seeking treaty were quite straightforward. They were anxious over reports of violence between Natives and prospectors on the land route to the Klondike. They were excited about the possibilities of mineral development on the south shore of Great Slave Lake and wished to remove any barriers to development arising from aboriginal land title. They were optimistic about fresh homesteading potential, in view of early assessments by John Macoun and George Dawson of the National Geological Survey. The key motive for Natives was the promise of assistance with food supply and medical care at century's end as the Hudson's Bay Company, which had created much of the problem due to demand of food for the

fur-trade and increased cash dependency on income from trapping, now began to withdraw from its role as subsidizer and creditor in lean times. Each side was aware of the other's interests. Both sides believed that they were negotiating terms of co-habitation in Alberta's north that would set terms of reference for development that would occur in a distant future, while ensuring subsistence in the present. It was the unexpectedly rapid pace of homestead pressure into the western Peace River region of the provincial north that was to confound these expectations.

The different futures for the next century was foreshadowed in the qualifications of a key promise made by Chief Commissioner David Laird, former Lieutenant Governor of the North West Terrritory. In his opening address on June 20, 1899, he stated, *You will be just as free after signing the treaty as you are now.... Indians who take treaty will be just as free to hunt and fish all over as they are now.* No issue was more important to the Native groups assembled at Grouard that day. It was on this very point that Native spokesman sought repeated reassurance. What appeared to be the agreement in principle reached on June 20 was reversed by overnight anxieties about hunting and fishing rights that required fresh assurances that they would continue free as before. The qualification of that repeated promise appeared in the text of the treaty, " *subject to such regulations as may from time to time be made by the Government of the country... and excepting such tracts as may from time to time may be required... for settlement, mining, lumbering, trading or other purposes*". When the Natives sought clarification of this phrase, they were given the example of the NWMP enforcement of the ban on poison baits which was popular with them. They sought a firmer guarantee but were told that the Commissioners lacked the authority to include it. Again an assurance was given that their traditional system of production based on an unregulated round of fishing, hunting, gathering and trapping would be unaffected. What was left unexplored was that future regulation of fishing and hunting by the government of Alberta might be enforced also on the treaty signatories, such that Natives in Fort Chipewyan, one of the richest natural flyways for migrating wildfowl, might be forbidden from hunting geese until the month they were available to hunters in southern Alberta and by which time they had left the north altogether, or forbidden from harvesting fish in the spawning season so that they might be left for sportsfishermen, or find the patterns of the moose disrupted by forestry and cut-line, or the river water made suspect by effluent from pulp mill and refinery.

When the commissioners came to Grouard they were accompanied by key missionary figures, Protestant as well as Catholic, who were trusted by the Native groups because of their history of advocating on behalf of these groups to the federal government. Such representatives spoke in favour of signing the treaty in order to ensure the provisions for subsistence. They also had an interest in the educational provisions of the treaty which bound the Canadian government to fund the missionary schools: *Further, Her Majesty agrees to pay the salaries of such teachers to instruct the children of said Indians as to Her Majesty's Government of Canada may seem advisable.* This was to become the basis for enlargement of mission schools, including early boarding schools, and expansion of regulations on school attendance, which underlay the development of residential schools of northern Alberta in Fort Chipewyan, Peace River, Sturgeon Lake, and Grouard. These schools were see themselves as the major instruments of assimilation, consciously attempting to replace traditional spiritual and social values with those Western Christianity and industrialism in a people thought to be at the last stages of their history as a people, physically as well as culturally. The spiritual arrogance and the managerial despotism that accompanied many in these efforts outweighed the sympathy and advocacy of the few, such as OMI Bishop Breynat, who came to realize that an old culture was being destroyed and being replaced only by rubble.

i. The Half-Breed Commission 1899-1900

Actually there were two Aboriginal cultures whose future was being forecast here in 1899-1900, represented in two commissions, the Treaty Commission and the Half-Breed Commission. What few protections were to be made available through Treaty #8 to the descendant of those Aboriginals who took treaty were not to be available to the Aboriginals who did not, the Metis. The presence of the Metis began in the early 19th century from the relationships of the early fur-trade and increased with the incoming of eastern Iroquois Metis traders and trappers from earlier settlements around Jasper House and Lac Ste. Anne by mid-century, with names such as Cardinal and Gladue. While some Metis were descendants of marriages and liaisons associated with the long history of the fur trade in northern Alberta, especially in the northeast Athabasca country, others were essentially economic refugees from further east and south, moving on as railroad and settlement pressed upon their cobbled together lifestyle of mixed hunting and pick-

up cash work. Other than ensuring that an individual had not already received land scrip as part of the settlement after the First Riel Rebellion in 1870, the Commissioners did not care whether an individual signed treaty or took scrip. There was no blood test. Choosing between being Indian or Metis was not a big deal for the commissioners or the signators, as seen in the appointment of Alexandre Laviolette, Metis, as Chipewyan spokesperson at Fort Chipewyan. The main concern of the commissioners was extinction of title and that would occur through adhesion to either document. The key difference was that the acceptance of land or cash scrip ended any further entitlement to support from or provision by the federal government. Why did so many Metis accept these terms and why did they reject the federal government's original insistence that scrip provided for children should be protected from sale by parents until age of majority? After all consideration of motives of Metis identity and insistence on individual autonomy, it is hard to resist the view that improvident focus on the immediate cash advantage played a key role. In 1899, 1,234 scrip notes were issued, of which only 48 were for land. No group was subsequently to be more disadvantaged by the unexpected pace of Euro-Canadian settlement and development than the Metis. In the past Metis had moved to new locations when they became displaced elsewhere. Northern Alberta proved to be the place from which there remained no further exit. The Metis of northern Alberta became increasingly economically and socially marginalized until their desperate situation as 'the road allowance people', on the edges of town and reserve alike, became the focus of the Ewing Commission in the 1930s.

j. 1900-1970: the Euro-Canadian experience

The Canadian government should have anticipated that development, particularly agricultural settlement, was going to occur much faster than reflected in the assumptions surrounding the Treaty #8 talks. The government of the United States had announced in 1892 that their frontier was officially closed and completed. It took a decade to fill the parkland of central Alberta with sons of farmers in eastern Canada, hopefuls from the mother country of Britain, enterprising Americans, and men in sheepskin coats from eastern Europe. That left only one great possibility – the Peace Country of northern Alberta. The groups of potential homesteaders began to gather and the government accelerated the pace of land survey in the northwest. By 1910 Walter Macfarlane had completed the survey of the County of Grande Prairie and a land registry office

was opened. But how to get there? There lay a barrier of two hundred kilometres of muskeg between the parkland region and the land of the Peace. The traditional route was via Athabasca Landing, upriver to Lesser Slave Lake, then along the south shore before following the trail onto the prairies of the Peace. A faster route was sought. In 1910 the second transcontinental railroad had passed Edmonton on its way to the Yellowhead Pass through the Rockies. It was thought that a wagon road might be cut north from Edson to Sturgeon Lake and so from 1911-1916 homesteaders left a trail of broken furniture and worn out horses throughout the length of the Edson Trail – our own modest version of the legendary Oregon Trail in American folklore and playing as important a part in building a prideful identity among their descendants in the 'Land of the Mighty Peace'. In 1916 the agony for men and horses was over, when the railroad reached Grande Prairie. Now indeed the rush could begin.

The Euro-Canadian homesteaders in the Peace assumed that they should work towards recreating the dominant society found to the south of them, since that after all was their society. The most accessible part of the Peace country was heavily settled by those of north European background, whether directly or via eastern Canada and the northern states of the USA. British, Scandinavian, Dutch, and German predominated. In the central Peace the Catholic church in Quebec, anxious to retain a demographic foothold in this new frontier and also relieve pressure on land resources in their own province, supported group settlement around Fahler and Girouxville. In the 1920s it was immigration from eastern Europe and former Russian Empire that worked the marginal agricultural fringe north of the Peace, around Keg River. Alarm about the possible threat to the predominant British character of the Peace country caused British organizations such as the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf to recruit horse-riding women of medical training with sound moral character, like Mary Percy Jackson, to act as cultural leaders of these pioneer societies. In those times, long before the adoption of the Maple Leaf flag and the repatriation of our constitution, British-Canadian sentiment was very strong at the level of public and official communication and arrangements. In 1939, in an effort – successful as it turned out – to bolster Canadian public support for the anticipated conflict of Britain with Germany , Prime Minister Mackenzie-King arranged for the new King George VI and Queen to travel across Canada. It was a triumph and when the royal tour reached Edmonton the Grande Prairie radio station CFGP (calling itself ' the most northerly radio station in the British Empire' and precursor of present-day Rock97) organized tours from the Peace Country.

It was proving up the homestead and then making a go of commercial mixed farming of grain and some cattle that filled most of the day and thoughts of these in-comers. And in the second half of the 1920s the reputation of the Peace Country in grain production became widespread. Sexsmith gained the title of 'Grain Capital of the British Empire' and Herman Trelle from Wembley won seven world championships for his crops in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The business of recreating the cultural and leisure activities of the dominant Canadian ecumene was also very important because that represented normalcy for these incomers. The first Christian church services on the Grande Prairie, occurring well before the land rush of the early 1900s were conducted by Catholic missionaries at Flyingshot Lake just south of the future town site. The first school on the Grande Prairie was at that settlement with Maude Clifford as teacher. The first church in the early settlement of Grande Prairie townsite was Presbyterian, conducted by Rev. Alexander Forbes in 1910. He was also forward in establishing the first school district in Grande Praire, while his wife Agnes acted as the nurse in the first 'hospital' which was the caboose in which they had travelled to the Peace Country along the Long Trail in winter through Athabasca and Lesser Slave Lake. They were both already past fifty years old. Their work in building the early institutions of Grande Prairie can still be recognized in the names of Forbes Presbyterian Church, Alexander Forbes School, and Montrose Cultural Centre (formerly Montrose Elementary then Junior High School). Their original homestead dwelling, which can still be seen on 97th Street, has been declared a provincial historic site. The first teacher in that school was a homesteader called I. V. Macklin, on whose homestead land the school of that name is located. Out in what was to become the county of Grande Prairie a series of small 4x4 (four miles by four miles) districts were formed consisting of up to sixteen homesteader families raising a minimum of 12? children of school age (not each), each capable of walking or riding the two miles to the newly built school located as near the centre as possible and set on a slight rise of land and shining with hope in its new paint, the key symbol of progress in what was Canada's newest and most northern farming frontier.

Baseball leagues were very popular, occasionally depleting Sunday morning service. And did you know that the grain elevators of Bluesky used to be on the Canadian dollar bill in the 1950s? Near Teepee Creek an annual rodeo began in the 1920s and soon developed into one of the most popular summer events of the South Peace, most famous for one of its bucking horses called he Teepee Creek Terror. Early community halls, constructed with volunteer labour and sales of

shares to local residents, can still be seen beside many of the secondary highways in the county. (One of the most remarkable examples of settler efforts at self-help was the attempt to stir the provincial governments of Alberta and BC to cooperate on building a northern pass through the Rocky Mountains, the Monkman Pass). Agricultural societies were formed for social activities as well as lectures from such advocates of scientific agriculture in the Peace as Donald Albright, first director of the agricultural experimentation station at Beaverlodge. County Fair days were major holidays accompanied by parades and suppers. Amateur dramatics and music performance became a distinctive part of cultural life in the Peace. The first Peace River Music Festival was held in 1924 and except for interruptions of war has continued to this day. It surely is not coincidence that Ben Heppner, one of Canada's greatest opera singers today, hails from Dawson Creek in the BC Peace Block, since that small community puts on a life opera performance every year. The Grande Prairie Little Theatre, now the GP Live Theatre, presents a full season of light and serious repertory year after year. At opposite ends of self-improvement were the pool halls that arrived after prohibition along with the bars and the lectures and uplifting readings that were part of the Chautauqua circuit beginning in the late 1920s until the Great Depression cut down the up-front local sponsorships needed to bring in the big tents.

The 1930s brought hardship to the Peace Country as it did to the rest of the country. What it did not bring was drought. The consequence was that although the region suffered from being cash poor the farming families who had experienced the boom grain markets and prices of the 1920s were close enough to their earlier homestead days that they could return to a lifestyle and life standard that provided a sufficiency from the grain sales, hay sales, and farmyard livestock they still supported. Entertainments became simpler again and voluntarism was necessarily more widely available. The most striking example of how these trends could come together is provided by the incredible community effort, centered on Beaverlodge and Rio Grande, to find a less expensive outlet for their grain to the west coast by the Monkman Pass Highway Association from 1937-1939. Men without work volunteered to chop a trail through the Monkman Pass, with provisions made available from local donations in such imaginative ways as the radio dances sponsored by the forerunner of today's Rock 97, CFGP, itself established in 1937 as "the most northern radio station in the British Empire". And other homesteaders came, as the Peace River region became the only agricultural region to experience an inflow of population in the Dirty Thirties. They came because there was word that rain still fell on homestead land that

remained available, though often now on the northern edges of the prairies midst the northern woods. Often these were men and families no longer young, driven by drought to abandon their farms on the southern prairies, at least one passing through with a brave sheet tied to the side of the wagon with the message “ Peace River or bust”. (Wetherell and Kmet, *Alberta’s North,* 248).

World War 11 brought economic benefits to northern Alberta from the mega projects to defend Alaska.: the Northwest Staging Line expanded airfields, the Alaska Highway provided demand for farm products, and the Canol Project began to shake Waterways (now Fort McMurray) into renewed activity as a transhipment point. At war’s end, the Peace Country remained as the only major region in Canada still available for homestead farming under the benefits available to veterans under the Veterans Lands Act. Returning soldiers could obtain for free one half-section of Crown land apiece, with title granted after ten years. New land was cleared in the north Peace country, though the Lassiter Project, as it was called, was to prove less successful than hoped. Nonetheless community growth continued and new lands were opened in the 1960s around High Level. The 1960s also marked the beginning of a new stage of forestry operations beyond the traditional small scale mills for local needs. By 1970 Proctor and Gamble’s huge pulp and paper operation in Grande Prairie served an international market. At Grande Cache the Smoky River Collieries was extracting coaking coal for Japan and planning for the massive Syncrude Project was underway in Fort McMurrray.

k. 1900-1970: the Native-Canadian experience

While the life fortunes of Euro-Canadian generally moved steadily upward between WW1 and the 1960s, the Native groups of the Peace Country generally experienced their most difficult days. Particularly along the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake and on the Grande Prairie and Fairview prairies the pressure on traditional Native life was greater and sooner than anyone had expected when Treaty #8 was signed in 1900. Native bands began to reverse their previous opposition to reserves. Some bands in areas of greatest settler movement into the region, around the west end of Lesser Slave Lake, arranged for the beginnings of reserves as early as 1901 at Sandy Bay and Sucker Creek. Duncan reserve was created at Shaftesbury Flats just upriver from

Peace River, in 1908 the Cree at Sturgeon Lake had accepted a reserve; in 1913 the Wabasca band finally received whatever protection reserve status would offer from claims on unsurveyed land by non-Native squatters. The price of non-protection of land through reserve survey is best represented by the Lubicon Lake band in the central interior. After three quarters of a century since 1933, the majority of that Cree band have still to reach agreement with the federal government on the membership of their band to act as the basis for a future reserve, while forestry leases and energy exploratory leases are still granted by the provincial government for land they claim as traditional. Occasionally even reserve status was not enough protection. The issue arose particularly when reserves were located in areas that filled up rapidly with homesteaders seeking to change the natural landscape to commercial agricultural monoculture. The attachment to the traditional round of seasonal activities, along with Indian Act barriers to commercial sale of agricultural products left areas of reserve land undeveloped other than pasture for horses. The appearance of land being left 'idle' provoked petitions to the department of Indian Affairs to inaugurate procedures for Indian band agreement to sell all or part of the reserve and receive compensatory land elsewhere. This happened at Kinuso, Sawridge and Sucker Creek on the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake. There the bands refused. One place where the petitions succeeded was Beaver Reserve #152, just south of Fairview, with the population agreeing to move to Horselake Reserve #152B. Eighty years later a court case established that the procedures for obtaining band permission were wrong and the Horselake Band was awarded $125million in compensation. This settlement exacerbated issues of band membership between Cree and Beaver descendants on the reserve and came decades late to prevent the almost complete loss of the Beaver language in the South Peace. . Further north the pressure from incoming Euro-Canadian settlement was not nearly so great. 1950 Busche River Reserve for Slavey near High Level. In 1963 Slavey reserves in the northeast, such as Meader River and Hay Lake, were added. The Lubicon Lake/Woodland Cree on-going reserve negotiation represents an anomaly. The last reserves were established down the Athabasca and Fort Chipewyan in the last decades of the 20th century, although the Aboriginal communities within which they are situated have existed for over two centuries.

The other downward pressures on the culture and economy of traditional Aboriginal life in northern Alberta, especially in the western Peace Country, came from the increased enforcement of attendance at residential schools and the decline of the old economy of hunting and trapping.

The general story of the residential school experience has been told elsewhere. The second, described below, is a story of the failure of Indian Affairs Branch in the interwar period to resist increasing restrictions on hunting in the interests of sport hunters and increasing issuance of trapping permits in the interests of non-Native trappers. By the 1940s treaty Natives were unable to resist pressures to move off the land and into year round settlements where government services could be more conveniently provided. Truly it has been said that Natives did not abandon the wilderness, but rather the wilderness abandoned them.

Those of the central and eastern Athabascan regions seemed frozen in time. The communities of eastern and central interior regions remained largely unaffected until the decades after World War II. The rhythm of life largely retained its Fall excitement of outfitting for the hunt, the hibernation of Winter broken by church-service at Christmas and gunfire to greet New Year, the trapping of fine furs in the deepest part of Winter, the return for Treaty Day and trading in the Spring, and the restful days of Summer by the fishing lake, before the round began again. The Chipewyan of Fort Chipewyan in the extreme northeast did not create a reserve until the 1950s and the Mikisew Cree band until the 1980s.

The account given so far of the Aboriginal experience in the half-century following Treaty #8 has been set in the context of those Aboriginals who took treaty. What of those who did not? What of the Metis? Funds for Metis children were not included in the grants by the federal government to residential schools, despite repeated requests by the churches. Some Metis children were taken in anyway, but most were left to attend such public schools as might be available in the often isolated locations where they lived. Often they simply did not exist, since public schools required the establishment of a public school district, which in turn required a minimum number of property-owning rate payers. Where Metis families did have access to a public school, they sometimes, not always, met such strong prejudice from white children or parents that they attended only intermittently or not at all. The educational disadvantages faced by Metis children were a reflection of the widespread poverty among that group. The Metis had and have always had to work out their living between the Aboriginal and the European. Their original economy had been tied to the fur-trade and the buffalo hunts of Red River that supported it with pemmican. The latter was now history and the first in tatters. By the 1930s the situation of many Metis in northern Alberta was dire. Many lived as squatters on Crown land and the

negotiations between federal and provincial government in 1932 indicated that squatter rights would be abolished. In that same year the Metis Association of Alberta was created to advocate for the Metis, most of whom lived in northern Alberta. By 1934 they succeeded in getting the provincial government to commit to an inquiry under Justice Albert Ewing. This Ewing Inquiry confirmed the desperate condition of many Metis and recommended the establishment of Metis settlements at several isolated regions – Paddle Prairie, Gift Lake, Peavine, and East Prairie. This provided land grants, though not title, and the schooling in these settlements was minimal and intended to assist only in a long-term movement of inhabitants toward commercial agriculture – though in such areas as homesteaders had not been interested in because of distance from market and quality of soil. Those who remained in or close to the Euro-Canadian settlements sometimes made a go of it – Alex Monkman was Metis – but most received such services as were made available to the indigent under the charity provisions of medical care and schooling, and often being the object of such open prejudice in the receiving of it that they accessed them as little as possible, thus continuing their condition.

The transmission of the traditional culture for all aboriginals was also being eroded by the loss of their children for the bulk of the year. It was in the interwar period that enforcement of discretionary powers on enforcement of attendance by Native children in Treaty bands moved to compulsory. Among those priest and nuns who advocated for the children in their care in the residential schools of Alberta's north were more who expressed a spiritual pride at their own religious ethnicity and inner anger at being still at evangelical work when the age of evangelism had passed by disparaging the Aboriginal culture and resorting to a form of control that reflected the view of Indians as 'les sauvages' who had threatened to destroy New France in the writings of Father Lionel Groulx, whose ideas were so influential at the times these very priests and nuns would have been receiving their own schooling and training. Among the long-term effects have been a destruction of the trust and therefore collaboration between school and home that is so important to the motivation of student. The anger of those who are the descendants of those who were harmed by the residential school experience supports the anger of students today toward an institution – schools – which are unavoidably in the business of making children often do things they would rather not. It also has lead to uncertainty over where the balance in the content of that schooling should be, between gaining credentials for successful competition in the Canadian meritocracy or re-gaining eroded traditional cultural knowledge and values.

In 1967 occurred two disparate events that represented both the threat to traditional ways and the determination to be master of their own Native identity in northern Alberta. An industrial development across the border, the 1967 Bennett Dam in British Columbia, was to seriously degrade the wildfowl and trapping that were a traditional resource for the Native people of the Peace-Athabasca delta at Fort Chipewyan. In that same year the Native community around Blue Quills School in Lac La Biche, led by Stanley Redcrow, who had worked for the school for 19 years as maintenance man and boys' supervisor, mounted an extraordinary political effort to prevent the closing of their school and arrange its transfer to the control of an education committee from the surrounding reserves, a first for Canada. The way forward was now signalled.

l. 1970 to the present

By the late 70s northern Alberta was benefitting from the spike in oil and gas prices following the most recent Middle East crisis. Canadian Hunter had begun to develop the Elmworth gas field. Syncrude began operations in Fort McMurray. All of this boom experienced a sharp decline in the early 80s coincident with a conflict between the federal government and the federal government over the National Energy Program, though forestry remained strong – so strong that alarm was raised by environmentalists and Native communities over the impact on rivers, and the number and size of forestry reserves being granted to companies like Daishowa covering areas still claimed by groups such as Lubicon Cree.

Two trends were evident by 2000 One was the overwhelming dominance of Grande Prairie and Fort Mc Murray in their respective regions of northern Alberta. Increasingly they represented islands of city life and amenities that largely insulated themselves from the larger setting of northern Alberta. The other was the extraordinary reassertion of the aboriginal peoples.

For the most part, the twentieth century was not kind to native culture in Northwestern Alberta. In a period of extensive development, first by farmers and later by gas, oil and forestry interests, native traditions were not viewed as progressive, and not therefore held in high esteem…. As the century wore on, much bitterness and low self-respect resulted from the inability or simple disinclination of many natives to function successfully in a white man's world . Recent times,

however, have brought a new sense of self esteem among the Indians of the Northwest, reflecting a general pattern across North America. Regional Indian Councils, such as the Lesser Slave Lake and the Western Cree, have adopted a position of high regard for their Elders and their traditional ways, recognizing themselves to be among the continent's First Nations. Contrasting their values with the perceived materialism of Euro-Canadian immigrants, many are choosing to dress in traditional apparel and make reference to their position as people who were once an integral part of the wilderness landscape .... Though generating a bit of a backlash in the white community ... this has also resulted in considerable public empathy for their plight, especially among the liberal press. Today in an environmentally conscious society, membership in a First Nation of the Northwest of Alberta is viewed as a position of status, linking the individual to the region's earliest history and beyond. (Leonard et al " Humans")

The hope is that both communities can share the north as co-operating dependents in the 21st century, as once they were three centuries ago at first contact.

4.

Teaching in a northern rural setting: moving to the north-country

a. Overtones of ‘rural

Analysis of the nature of today’s school-community relations in rural communities begins from the layered meanings attached to the word ‘rural’ itself. If northern towns felt at one remove from the centre of the action in the culture setting metropolitan centres, then would not rural communities in the provincial north define themselves as even further diminished?

What is rural? One problem facing rural education is the lack of a definitive understanding of the meaning of ‘rural’. The word is often defined from an outsider’s and urban perspective, in much the same way that the dominant culture has traditionally spoken for minority groups.... Even though our times are characterized by a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences, it is still considered socially and politically correct to poke fun at “ rednecks”, “hillbillies” and “hicks”..... Click on your thesaurus when your cursor is on the word ‘rural’ and see what you find. Our computers listed ‘provincial, uncultured, unrefined, hinterland, backwoods’ and ‘forsaken’..... For ‘urban’, the thesaurus listed ‘civic, civil, cultured’. Over time, such connotations have a way of becoming the norm. (Herzog and Pittman, “ Home, Family, and Community”)

Yet many in these communities feel that their different character brings advantages and thus refuse to be defined only in terms of deficits.

b. Realities of ‘rural’

It is first a matter of prizing a stronger sense of community and of family connectedness to community, even when it means poking fun at oneself, as in excerpts from an internet posting, called 'Living in small towns in the 60s'

You know you grew up in a small town when:

1. *You can name everyone you graduated with*
2. *You know what 4-H means*
3. *The whole school went to the same party after graduation*
4. *Your teachers called you by your older sibling's names*
5. *Your teachers remembered when they taught your parents.*

c. Rural sociology

One of the classic sociological analyses of the causes and consequences of this highly conscious sense of community in rural settings was carried out by Don Dillman, former Chair of the Department of Rural Sociology at Washington State University. (Dillman and Hobbs *Rural Society in the U.S. – Issues for the 1980s*). He identified four conditions of rural communities: smallness of population, similarity of life style, limited in- and out-migration, and overlapping involvement in the community's social institutions. From these conditions he believed a number of consequences followed which represented differences from, if not opposition to, the accepted social and professional expectations and protocols in an urban setting: for example, mandatory vs voluntary participation in community group projects; expectation of a common set of behavioural values in all aspects of life and work vs. acceptance that private behaviour need not always match public role; work relations and behaviour match community norms vs. professional roles governed by formal written policies and protocols; family matters vs. credentials determine status and authority.

These consequences for the student can be illustrated from the memoir of one undergraduate who sought to find parallels between her own experience and Dillman's template of rural values. Mandatory participation in school arrangements was evident, since if enough people

would not participate in a particular activity or program, the activity or program would not exist. Acceptance into the grade four band program was automatic but choice of instrument depended on ensemble gaps. Minimum numbers were needed for some high school classes, so friends were guilted into enrolling. Amusing examples of the expected complementarity of roles in a rural setting, compared to large urban, are provided., although it is also interesting to speculate whether such responses would remain common today.

On the U of C campus, I have encountered two particular situations that startled me. The reason each circumstance startled me was because I say the participants of each engaging in what I thought were conflicting roles. If such conflcting behaviours were observed in Kaslo, heavy sanctions would be employed upon the deviant person and great embarrassment would result. The first situation occurred when I was in the physical education work out center. I was shocked and embarrassed to seem my psychology professor in less than modest clothes pumping iron, and admiring himself in front of the mirrors. Of course he did not recognize me, but I certainly didn't expect to see him there. The second situation took place outside of one of my education classes. After our class had finished I happened to follow the professor out as we were leaving. We had to pass through a set of the regular education building class doors. The professor, being in front, I expected would open the doors with one of his free hands. However, it was not to be. He gave a violent "hi-ya" type kick and opened the door with the force of his foot……Of course I didn't say anything, but I was quite perplexed over the whole incident. (Dilling, " Dillman's Typology in Kaslo, B.C.)

Another aspect concerned the importance of the student's primary relationship in the rural setting – as the son or daughter of a particular family, with an established reputation and status in terms of 'good stock' or 'bad stock' –

In the urban setting my linkages and connections are completely different depending on which institution I am involved with. For instance, on the University I am #######, when talking with AGT I am #####, for banks and government agencies I am ########. No regard is given to my parents, where I live, or even my first name or last name. (Dilling, "Dillman's Typology")

One final aspect can represent a bridge between the world of the student and the teacher – the issue of credentialing. Again this is a matter that has continued to change with time, yet there is much anecdotal support for a persisting difference that can be detected in rural hiring. The student writer reported that many times a desired local applicant's qualifications were tallied up and then a job description fitting these qualifications was posted. In Calgary, she felt, the job is detailed and specific in its credential requirements. Again, common experience can likely name examples of 'massaged' job descriptions from urban settings as well, yet the general point stands up.

d. Expectations about teachers

It is a short step to estimating the impact of such school community expectations in rural communities on the role of the teacher. The teacher will be expected to play a supporting, if not leading, role in a range of school and community sporting, social, and cultural activities. The teacher's private life must resemble that of Caesar's wife in being open to public examination and above suspicion. The teacher's professional actions in choice of classroom materials and subjects must weigh professional autonomy against the community's norms of taste and propriety. Finally, perhaps, the key difference is that in urban settings schools are seen by the professional administrators and teachers as essentially their affair, with the role of public and parental involvement as very circumscribed; in rural settings the community assumes entitlement to offer opinion on and receive access to the schooling enterprise to a degree that marks their belief that the schools are theirs, not the teachers.

e. Teacher readiness

We have now begun to move to a more nuanced portrait of the nature of school-community relations in a rural setting, particularly as they might affect a beginning or in-coming teacher. There also appears to be an important distinction to be made between the readiness – in terms of what to expect regarding school-community relations – of those who grew up in a rural school

setting and those who moved to that setting from an urban background or even from a different rural community. One study that interviewed a number of female professionals in that situation did indeed suggest, as might be expected, that community friendliness and helpfulness was accompanied by gossip, that the pleasing importance the community attached to one's professional role meant also being an object of scrutiny outside work, that acceptance into the community waited upon buying a home vs renting, and especially was affected by the state of personal relationships with suitable males in the community. The strongest conclusion, however, was that such professional in-comers must be prepared for relative absence of colleagues with whom to share professional concerns and a community expectation of professional 'duties' that is fuzzy at the edges, lacking the clear boundaries of urban job descriptions. Take the case of one rural speech-language pathologist.

Sylvia was the speech-language pathologist for a large rural area. She had moved from an urban position to a rural one. She found herself alone in both a new position and a new environment. Sylvia's first impressions of the community were that it was small, treed and green….. It was a different world. Strangers waved and were friendly. Self-sufficiency was a way of life … if anything broke, there was help to repair it….It was refreshing after city life…. She found good friends here but also witnessed the negative side of gossip clearly demonstrated when somebody " got run out of town". She was more wary and ended up not saying anything. Sylvia found her sense of humour didn't match …humour was "physical" while hers was dry. It didn't catch….Work wise, it was hard….The lack of funding to support an effective position with basics was frustrating. It was not like university. But the children Sylvia worked with were always a joy and provided a constant source of inspiration. (Foster, " Voices from Rural Canada")

Add to that the observation of another researcher that the very strength of tradition within a rural community, which lead to so much that is supportive toward 'their' school, can also act as a limit on an incoming young teacher who wishes to push the limits of accustomedness in the classroom.

... a lack of support for teachers in the rural setting tends to occur for individuals who entered the profession and the community with 'difference'. Those who are unwilling to fit the mould of traditional teaching, as rural community members know it, and/or those who take risks, invite

change, and respect diversity will struggle to gain support from colleagues and community members alike. Students, colleagues and community will, almost inevitably, peck away at *the change or difference and influence the teacher and/or the powers that be, until they either conform or move on. Confirmation, if it occurs quickly enough and thoroughly enough will eventually result in community acceptance. However, the road is long and somewhat bumpy.* (Cummins, " Overcoming the Ties that Bind Us")

This striking congruence between the cultural values of school and community, then, can act as a zone of exclusion for those who would challenge the customary ways. Before, however, this is too quickly the cause of condemnation, it must be recalled that the risk of experiment in rural schools is greater. Most grades have only one teacher and most high school subjects only one specialist. The risks of unfamiliar teacher innovation are greater because there is no opportunity for transfer next term or next year.

f. Surveys of teacher perceptions

So what are the perceptions by school teachers of the conditions of their professional life in rural school settings in northern Alberta, along with the impact of community upon their more personal life? In 1997 the Alberta Teachers Association conducted a survey of rural teaching and working conditions – see Appendix A. The questions on Professional Issues asked about opportunities for professional interaction with colleagues, professional development opportunities, opportunities for transfer and promotion, job security, and perceived ability to affect decisions at the school and jurisdictional level. With one exception, respondents were either evenly split on the statements or of the opinion that the issue was not a problem. That exception – the opportunity for teachers to influence decisions made at the jurisdictional level – was clearly identified as a problem. The questions on Instructional Issues asked about problems related to the number of specific courses or grades taught, access to pupil-support services, physical state of the school building, impact of busing on instruction and access to technology. A substantial majority fo the teachers surveyed did not perceive these instructional issues as being a problem, although some written comments received suggested that those teachers who were

experiencing problems in these areas, especially regarding rapidly changing curriculum in multi-grade classrooms, considered these problems to be serious. The questions on Community Issues asked about community expectations of teachers in extracurricular activities and supervision, how teachers are viewed by the community and whether teachers are under community scrutiny in their personal lives. The responses showed a relatively even distribution between teachers who perceived community issues as not a problem and a slight majority who felt that they were. Personal Issues asked about isolation from friends, family and urban amenities and whether colleagues and/or the public view teaching in a rural area as being less prestigious than teaching in urban areas. The majority of respondents indicated that the personal issues identified in the survey were not problems. This contrasted with two-thirds of those who provided written comments who did report discomfort. (Hackman, *1997 Rural Teaching and Working Conditions Survey*)

The 1997 survey report recommended that a similar survey be administered in two to three years to measure any change in patterns of response. This did not happen. In 2009 this author approached the ATA for permission to re-administer the same survey to selected school districts in northern Alberta that particularly contained schools in rural or remote Native communities. With permission from the ATA and the superintendents of Zone 1, covering most of our provincial north, this second survey took place- see Appendix B. It was assumed that a provincially based report on issues of isolation from professional and personal support for teachers in rural setting in 1997 would have been at least no less at that time for teachers in our northern region. This made the responses in 2009 all the more interesting. They demonstrated a markedly higher level of positivity regarding Professional and Instructional Issues. On the other hand the responses indicated a worsening of perceptions of the teacher situation with regard to Community Issues and Personal Issues. It appeared to be the case that the matter of resources related to professional development and classroom facilities was being well handled by school district boards and administrations, but not the 'softer' issues of regularly communicating to the teacher their value and worth to the district and the community.

g. Valuing rural teachers

There is no question that the sense of being valued is critical to finding rural teaching to be a personally enriching experience – remembering that the first person to feel intellectual and emotional benefit from your work as a teacher should be yourself. A series of article entitled " Small Schools are Unique" that was published in 2001 by the Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune.

Woking school grade 3/4 teacher Kathy Anderson can't imagine teaching anywhere else but a small school... " I think knowing their background is critical to giving them a good education.... I think it's the most important thing in education today, because we provide all the services now, we have to be front-line for them, so we need to know where they're coming from." (*Lawrence,* "Small Schools are unique")

Hythe Elementary school grade I teacher Danielle Seabrook looks upon the smaller class sizes as a good thing.... " With a small group I've had the opportunity to try out a few more strategies. If I had 30 kids, I might not be as more apt to try and branch out." (Lawrence, " Small Just Fine with kids")

Nor is there any doubt about how much rural communities retain their identity through their village schools.

A trip to Elmworth reveals that the school is literally the heart of the community. Beside it (the school) lies a general store, a curling rink, a couple of houses and an old church. To an outsider, it may not seem like much, but.... Elmworth school principal Ivan Crabbe knows... what a school closure would do to this small farming community and to this province. " I just think that if we don't pay attention some day we're going to lose what has commonly been called the backbone of our society, our rural Alberta .(Lawrence " It's about community")

The strength of such community feeling was at the heart of a recent proposal to close the village school in Valhalla in the South Peace in 2008. It happened that this particular community contained a remarkable number of individuals with strong political connections to the provincial government, along with financial donations from major energy companies operating in the area. The outcome was a remarkable translation of the public village school into a publicly funded charter school with a mission statement to develop rural leadership.

Valhalla reflects only remarkably the high community and parental involvement in the rural schools of northern Alberta. This covers fundraising, parent council , sports and other extra-curricular activities. In addition, while rural schools still maintain use of formal contacts such as parent council meeting. Parent –teacher interviews, newsletters, and school bulletins there is a larger reliance on informal contact outside the school. At first these may make a newer teacher feel uncomfortable, but many teachers come to feel that it is simply the rural version of an open-door policy in their classroom.

h. Islands of Euro-Canadianism

This close bond between school and community is reflected in the very physiognomy of the rural classroom in northern Alberta. Overwhelmingly both staff and students come from Euro-Canadian farming, even original homesteading, backgrounds. A glance down the register of a rural classroom will reveal surnames that are overwhelmingly north European – British, Dutch, German, Scandinavian, with a increased presence of former East European and Russian as one moves northward. Compare this to the urban classroom – even is such small city settings as are found in the north – where the teacher remains overwhelmingly Caucasian, but the student body increasingly reflects the new visible minorities of recent immigration patterns from South Asia. Multiculturalism is a reality in these classrooms. It is largely an exercise in rural classrooms. Later chapters will focus on the dilemmas created in the classrooms of remote Native communites where the sharp and evident differences between the culture and the cultural values of Euro-Canadian teachers and Native-Canadian students create many problematic aspects of schooling.

i. Minuses and pluses

This relative cultural homogeneity of the rural schooling situation, then, can create walls. Within these walls, however, can be found enormous community support for schooling and

encouragement for students. It is indeed a model of schooling that quite remarkably bears resemblance to what many educational critics are calling for in our urban schools.

... the positive feelings (students) had about living in rural areas were connected with their families, homes, and small communities and with peace, safety, and caring. Many of them have chosen a career in education so that they will be able to return to their homes after college.... It is curious that rural communities, which for so long have been marginalized by the dominant culture, have precisely the qualities for which critics... are now looking. As educators, we need to recognize these strengths, take advantage of them, and build the preparation of rural educators around them. (Herzog and Pittman, " Home, Family, and Community")

This sense of shared values and lifestyle can be of particular assistance to students in the often difficult transition from elementary to secondary school. The experience of one researcher was that this commonality can bridge separate socio-economic realities and differences in academic aptitude that feed into the social fragmentation and program streaming that is so evident in large urban secondary schools.

The cultural homogeneity of this rural area meant there was no significant gap between the school and community experience of these students. School values tended to reflect community values. Choosing between them was not an issue for most students. This seemed to reduce students' feelings of isolation and, in turn, the alienation which is often associated with student transition in culturally diverse settings. (Walsh,'"Rural students' transitions to secondary school")

This is the strength that rural schooling possesses, in northern Alberta as in the rest of the province

[Chpt 4 figures go here – see Ross_Chpt4_figures.docx]

5.

Glimpses of northern time and place: non-Native memories of frontier schools

1. The long tradition

On September 3, 2010, the Globe and Mail reported on the last public one-room school in the Prairies in a tiny Saskatchewan hamlet.

It is the last of its kind, the sole survivor of a tradition of one-room public schools that once formed the backbone of childhood life on the Canadian Prairies. Romanticized as a spare, storybook fixture of early 20th-century rural communities, such classrooms were in fact born out of necessity – and that was the case with Sasdaze School in the tiny hamlet of Bear Creek, Saskatchewan. (Wingrove, "One-room schools")

There are a number of things one can take out of the newspaper report that still form part of the ethos of rural schools today, though now much changed in structure, grade specific classrooms, and above all bussing. First, the motive behind their founding, along with the effort required to keep the school going.

" ... You've got to get educated, " Mr. Herman (mayor of the hamlet) says, adding:" We'll keep the school here going as long as we can"...." It was part of the soul of the community", says University of Calgary historian Paul Stortz, who has studied the legacy of one-room schools in the West. " You see a picture of the one-room school – that embodies the human intrepidness and ambition to overcome the most onerous and austere of odds and make things work in Canada."

They (the parents) struck a deal with the local school board, but only after putting up about $116,000 to buy a modified trailer and a home for the teacher. (Wingrove, " One-room schools ")

Second, a suggestion that the school should represent reflect the values and be open to the participation of the community in its work rather than, as in urban settings, be viewed as a place run by professionals with clear arms-length protocols governing the place of parents.

" For me, my kids learn more in this community, going to this school." Says Ms. Woodward, who volunteers to run after-school programming. "More quiet, more relaxing. As a parent, you can help in the education." (Wingrove, "One-room schools part of the soul of the community")

Third, the on-going threat that dwindling numbers may finally overcome even the greatest efforts of the local community to keep their local school open.

Enrolment numbers are dwindling, though. If the class gets much smaller, the school... risks being closed. Local superintendent of education Jason Young declines to speculate what the "magic number" would be... (Wingrove, " One-room schools")

Finally, the romanticization of the Euro-Canadian homesteader-created one-room school that still casts an after-glow over rural schooling today

(They) strike a nostalgic tone for many, Prof. Stortz says. " There was a romantic movement in the early part of the 20th century in Canada that romanticized Canadians as being honest, pure, driven – anything else you might think of as being a positive characteristic. Hearty, long-lived.... So the one-room schools to many people might, in fact, embody that," he says. " It's like a coalescing of what 'Canada' meant back when Canada was being settled." (Wingrove, " One-room schools")

Indeed such nostalgia has a long tradition stretching back over greater distances and longer time than Western homesteading. Consider this account of the efforts to establish higher education among the Presbyterian pioneers in Nova Scotia in the early 19th century.

That the Presbyterians who first settled in Pictou County were interested in the provision of higher education for their people, out of all proportion to their numbers, has long since been the subject of academic debate and discussion.... Men and women sought that opportunity for their children with a dedication almost equal to their concern that every community be provided with the opportunity to worship God in the tradition of their ancestors. Indeed, when the esteemed Dr. James MacGregor baptized children of the immigrants, of whatever denomination, he added a fourth question to the traditional three asked of the parents. " Do you promise to provide for your child the best possible education of which you are capable?".... One minister of a century ago, speaking on this theme, is reported to have said that it was almost as if "our ancestors believed that the salvation of one's soul came about through the enlightenment of one's mind!". (Mackenzie, Gathered by the River, Foreword)

The traditions of Euro-Canadian rural schooling in northern Alberta lack the duration but none of the commitment of these earlier incomers

2. The basic timeline

Notheless there have always been some distinct characteristics to the timing and the pattern of public schooling in northern Alberta. The timing is uneven, marked by a long delay until World War 1 compared to the rest of the province, followed by a rush of construction of one-room country schools that continued longer than the rest of the province since active homesteading in northern Alberta continued into the post-World War 11 period. The pattern is unique due to the much larger presence of Metis and Treaty Aboriginals than the rest of the province, leading to by far the larger number of Metis Settlement schools and by far the largest school district in the province, Northland School Division #61, especially designed to serve the schooling needs of isolated Native settlements in the central and northeast portion of the northern region. The creation of Metis Settlements and the founding of Northland School Division will be treated in the chapter following the Native residential school experience. The present chapter will describe some aspects of the non-Native Euro-Canadian schooling endeavour into the early post –WW11 period.

Because the first sustained Euro-Canadian contact with the future Alberta was through the fur-trade and because the fur-trapping and transportation routes for that trade were focussed in the Athabasca country, the earliest schools in future Alberta were all in its northerly region. They were all mission schools, however, and remained outside the formal public school system which began to emerge in the North West Territories even before provincial status in 1905. The chronology of establishing organized school districts in northern Alberta, outside the missions attached to fur-trading posts and river transportation centres, generally followed the pattern of homestead settlement in the northwest, Alberta's last agricultural frontier. That pattern of rural schools generally kept step with the chronology of villages as they were created as service centres for the surrounding homesteaders. First in the south and central Peace River Country , beginning in the second decade of last century: Beaverlodge 1910, Grande Prairie 1911, Sexsmith 1912, Fairview 1914. After WW11, the homesteading frontier, and difficult it was, lay in the north Peace Country: Manning 1951, High Level 1965, Rainbow Lake 1967.

c. The classic model of rural schooling

The fullest generic description of the rural one-room school phase of public schooling on the Canadian prairies has been provided by John Charyk's series: *Little White Schoolhouse* 1968, *Pulse of the Community* 1970, *Those Bittersweet Schooldays* 1977. He admired what he believed he saw.

The Little White Schoolhouse was the bulwark of civilization in a new and primitive land. Under its roof devoted and knowledgeable men and women, steeped in the traditions and cultures of the old world, passed on to children the fundamentals of an education that had taken mankind centuries to garner and learn. (Charyk, *Little White Schoolhouse*, 1).

The perceived importance of the institutional mission would have been entirely understood by Gabrielle Roy, herself a former schoolteacher. In *Where Nests the Waterhen* (1951), Roy described the excitement of the mother Luzina as she anticipated the culmination of her campaign for a school to serve her family on its isolated homestead in northern Manitoba.

Thirteen years ago she had come to this place over a track you could scarcely make out in the wilderness. Little by little the grass had been flattened by the passage of vehicles, and at the end of a few years you had been able to see a sort of road emerge, fairly well marked. Then they had begun to receive the mail once a week. Come, now! ..... And now a schoolmistress was on her way to the island in the Little Water Hen. Oh, there was no doubting it at all: civilization, progress were blowing in this direction like the thawing spring breeze. (Roy, *Where Nests the Waterhen,* 62-63)

In treating this theme, as in the later chapters dealing with the Native experience of residential schooling, a general portrait of the institution in question will be provided, followed by a record of individual experiences of the respective forms of schooling as they occurred in northern Alberta.

The general procedure for forming a school district was fairly strict, since such a district immediately had a claim on government grants for construction and staffing. Because established roads did not exist in frontier areas, the customary size was four miles square, with the school to be located as centrally as possible to prevent district children having to walk more than two miles to and from school, if they lacked horses or wagons . Of course, children living in the very newest homesteads beyond the existing boundaries and without schools must walk or ride further. Naming could be quite idiosyncratic, though district names or the name of the settler who provided the original site were common. Once the district had developed so far as to have municipal government then part of the funding shifted to local school tax mill rate. Anticipation of this eventuality was often a cause for foot-dragging by some settlers, although research suggests that 'bachelors' have been unjustifiably calumned. Due to difficulties in tax-collection during the Great Depression of the 1930s, it became common for teacher salaries to be in arrears, which led to the school district consolidation movement by the end of that decade. One of the first pieces of legislation by the new legislature of Alberta in 1905 was the School Grants Act. Grants were tied to the number of days the school was open, the teacher`s certificate, the level of pupil attendance ( hence the importance of the class register), and inspector`s report (hence the importance attached to that visit).

There were several departmentally approved designs for ungraded one-room elementary-school construction. Most common was a gable roofed structure 20`x30`, one wall of windows facing east, with an attached cloakroom, and a detached outhouse. Barns for stabling student horses were often also provided. The school was usually painted in white with green or black trim, with the barn a dull red. Charyk noted that`*they could be distinguished miles away and appeared to gleam as bright beacons of hope in a dark world of ignorance. The clean, pungent odor of fresh paint and varnish of the new schoolhouse ... on opening morning still remains to this day in the memory of many a person of the one-room school era'.* (Charyk, *Little White Schoolhouse,* 93)

Other memory invoking odors were the smells of drying clothes or mitts across the heating pipes in winter and the smell of linaments for aches and pains. Classroom furniture, all designed for right handed people, was sometimes homemade in the first years of the frontier school; all pieces were moveable to make room for dances and other community events. Neilson Chocolate Company provided some of the wall maps in the late 30s, with imperial colonies and dominions clearly marked in red around the globe. There was often a small raised platform at the front for student recitations. A Union Jack flag and picture of the reigning British monarch were the focus for morning patriotic exercises.

d. Early rural students and teachers

The student, of course, was a rural student living midst quite distinct ambient sounds, sights and rhythms of daily life. The sounds were of feeding and milking domesticated animals, the cry of wild coyotes and migrating geese, the whirr of farm machinery, the stamping passage of horses and creaking of wagons. The feel of daily and seasonal weather was immediate and pervasive on the skin – sun, wind, blue sky, and darkening storm, pleasing warmth and biting cold. Different smells – new mown hay, the dank smell of new newly turned fields, smoke of burning stubble, the smell of first rain in spring. A different sense of the passage of time and the opportunities for private reflection in that hour-long walk to school.

The teacher may or may not have been country-raised. Though most were from the Canadian West, necessarily most came from the most populated southern regions, many from urban

settings. Some such individuals, though often staying for only one year, became important as windows to other worlds, ideas, and experiences, including being a model of styles of dress and manners for older students.Young female teachers were often assessed as prospective brides by the community`s bachelors, while young male teachers were often birds of passage, either financing their way through medical or law school, or aiming at promotion to principal and, most desirably, superintendency. For those unaccustomed to rural distances, the country at first must have seemed `just one big emptiness`, especially in the first descent from the train into a chilly and silent dawn, to await the last leg on a school trustee`s wagon to their teacherage or billet. There was no certainty as to whether teacherage or billet was better. All cases were individual. Some teacherages were detached and some an annex to the school. Teacherages provided privacy, but at risk of loneliness and physical insecurity. Billets could be crowded, but provided support of a family routine and means for a weekly Saturday night visit to town.

Standards of training and levels of certification varied in different decades, falling behind in periods of high need as immigration and homesteading surged, rising in times of economic hardship, falling again in times of shortage caused by war recruitment and a post-war boom, finally beginning a steady rise as universities increasingly took over teacher-training from normal schools after World War 11. Until then, many teachers were hired for frontier districts on the basis of one two-month summer school session, with three more to come. Even that was better than the expedient required in some districts that held school between May and August staffed by summer students from universities in the East, particularly Queen`s, or were forced to become ``correspondence`` schools supervised by a senior student. By the early 1970s, all provinces were requiring a degree for permanent certification, with many older teachers backfilling their credentials at college and university night courses and summer schools.

e. Early learnings

The ungraded nature of the classroom created a strikingly homogenous learning experience through all the years of a child`s schooling. With a very few exceptions, one-room ungraded schools offered schooling up to but not including high school. Between 1910 and 1936 grade

eight was the final year that preceded high school. Thereafter grade nine returned to being the entrance year. For the overwhelming number of children that was their final year, and many were hampered in achieving that due to prolonged absence for spring and fall farm work. The multi-grade teaching usually meant combining children in grades one and two as Standard 1, grades three and four as Standard 2, and so on. Within these combined groups, curricular subject grade levels were flipped up or down to enable common work. There was necessarily a lot of desk work based on directions for the groups not being directly instructed, the directions being in carefully demarcated sections of the blackboard at the front of the class. Text books were often in short supply, making a cooperative desk mate (most seats were double) very desirable. Paper was limited and had to be used up completely. There was a lot of emphasis on practicising memorizing texts and tables, since it saved on material as well teaching energy, and consequently recitations were common. With such a range of ages and maturity, student management was an essential skill. The best, then as now, was self-management nourished by a relationship of mutual liking and respect between teacher and pupils. Every teacher`s desk held a leather strap, though use varied.

f. The rhythm of the school year

The school day contained more than lessons. It started with the walk or ride to school; the horse might carry several passengers, all of different sizes; the footpath might be uncertain in places and stream crossings be by makeshift bridges. Schooling took place mainly in winter and winter brought its own dangers, of which the blizzard was the greatest. Schoolyards were not fenced and in a whiteout children could become disoriented going to the outhouse. The rule became that if a blizzard struck during school hours, the children were to remain until someone came for them. Lunch pails were as natural a part of the schoolroom as schoolbooks; indeed Charyk declared it a symbol of the Little White Schoolhouse. (Charyk, *Little White Schoolhouse,* 270) Recess and lunchtime activities occurred in the school*yard* that made no pretence of being a designed playground with organized equipment. The feature that characterized the many activities was that all the children, whether they were in grade one or grade ten, took part in them. This generality does not gainsay schoolyard oppression by older or meaner children, and

playground `wars` in some districts where homesteaders came from different ethnic backgrounds.

The school year contained more than the respective grade level program of studies. The Fall sometimes meant involvement in an Agricultural Fair, though in most cases the teachers had not had enough time to `work up` the students regarding any large number of exhibits. Early Winter brought the Christmas concert. It was very democratic, with no child left out; it was also widely viewed, along with grade 8 departmental results, as a major criterion for assessing the teacher, leading Charyk to muse why Normal Schools did not offer a course called `Sponsoring a Christmas Concert. (Charyk, *Pulse of the Community*, 141) Late Winter brought Music festival with choral readings as the least expensive, most inclusive, and therefore most common frontier school entry. Nonetheless individual schools excelled in choir due to the skill and inspiration of their teacher and an example from the Metis community of Kelly Lake will be provided in a later chapter. Spring brought the annual picnic and sports day.

g. School and community

In the early years of homestead settlement, before the building of a separate community hall, the school building was also the centre of community events outside the school`s own annual calendar: organizational meetings of the women`s institute, farmer`s union, political meetings, local drama and music groups, showers, weddings, and funerals, early church services, Sunday Schools (church based young people’s groups in general were important institutions) , and immunization clinics. Country dances were held there, usually on Friday evenings, with babies safely anchored within the pushed back desks, small children dancing with parents, a `lunch`at midnight and a small something for the road for those still present at daybreak. As roads `improved` then dances became less immediately local, taking place in newly constructed community halls; in the same way the sites of community picnics over time moved off the school grounds to some attractive lakeside or hillside spot that more could now reach. In the later years of homestead development, the calendar of community events in a homesteader’s immediate district was knit together with weekly visits to town on a Saturday night. Archival photographs

of Saturday night activity in hamlets and villages before World War II show over and over again both sides of an unpaved main street filled by angle parked cars and wooden sidewalls crowded with pedestrians patronizing late-opening stores and cafes.

Rural schooling could experience reverses as well as improvement. The rural school reflected the fortunes of the community it served. A neat, well-kept, attractive and up-to-date country schoolhouse was a sign of a progressive community. It indicated that the people of the district had spirit, purpose, pride and dedication.From the perspective of the local school board, the greatest challenge was indebtedness arising from low farming incomes in the Thirties. For pupils, especially younger ones, the rapid turnover of teachers in the early, hardest years was stressful. Parents varied in their estimate of the right balance of necessary schooling and the young person`s contribution to the family`s material needs through working out. The further `out` the location of the school district, the further from railhead or gravelled road, the more difficult it became to access any kind of high-school teaching. Such parents as wished to and could, must, at their own expense, rent private accommodation and pay registration for the term in the community that had enough taxpayers to support a high school. In time, formal transfer arrangements were worked out with such town facilities, which were expanded to include supervised dormitories for out of town pupils. In fact, it was the combination of increasingly pressed financing, the dis-economies of small scale as land ownership and aging families in the original 4x4 district reduced pupil enrolment over a period of 15-20 years from first homesteading, and the increasing wish that children access secondary schooling, that led to accelerating rural school consolidation from the late 1930s over the next decade and a half. In Alberta in 1938 there were 3,302 one-room schools, while by 1963 there were only 137.

h. The northern difference

The dominant context of the rural school was farming, of course. But what requires attention is that the northern Alberta is divided into two zones: the agricultural region of the Peace River Country in the west and the non-agricultural regions of the north-central and north-east. The west is the delayed frontier of Euro-Canadian homestead settlement; the north central and eastern

region remained dominantly aboriginal until the mid-point of the 20th. century. Thus we do not write of the whole provincial north, but principally of the western region that experienced rapid Euro-Canadian settlement between 1910 and 1930, following completion of land surveys and arrival of railroad. Yet it still deserves noting that the farming economy and associated social culture was still a generation behind the rest of the province in both the scale of operations and size of settlements, so that conditions of small size and relative isolation continued to be defining characteristics well into the interwar period and were repeated after World War II for a decade as new homestead lands were opened up in the northernmost areas of the Peace Country.

Whereas many today think of one-room schools as a primitive and undesirable way of delivering public education (now conceived of as on the 'delayed frontier' of northern Alberta with poor roads and simple transportation methods the multi-grade, one-room school within walking distance of its pupils was the most effective way of delivering schooling, especially in the new homestead regions of the post WW11 regions. The late 40s showed strong movement to school consolidation in the south Peace Country as the post war shortage of teachers hit small country schools especially hard and as the number of students declined with maturing families and the increase in the size of farm operations. Most one-room schools lasted only two generations at most in areas where a high level of homesteading took place over one to two decades. This was particularly evident in the south Peace Country where schools rose from minimal numbers in the first decade and a half before the railroad to crowding in the 20s and 30s, followed by unsatisfactory supply teaching and correspondence schooling during the teacher shortages of WW11, leading to post-war calls for graded schools with permanent teachers at the cost of school consolidation if need be.

i. Northern cases

The northernmost public school district was Fort Vermilion, with its long history of Euro-Canadian association with the fur-trade, with the Anglican mission, and farming enterprises of the Lawrences.One former pupil wrote of starting school there in 1931, two months before his

fifth birthday, because the school board needed at least thirty students to qualify for a grant toward the teacher's salary.

Our school was a single room log structure with no plumbing or electricity. During midwinter we were forced to shorten school hours by half an hour in the morning and the same in the afternoon due to darkness. We travelled about two miles to school often on foot but in extreme cold weather we drove our dogs. During my first Christmas concert I recited the well loved poem ''Twas the Night before Christmas' and was slightly embarrassed by the applause from the audience..... Young boys like me usually wore leather helmets with sheepskin or fleece lining ... breeks were the most common type of pants....laced snugly below the knee. Heavy wool socks covered our legs from just below the knee.... Some of the boys wore bib overalls .... (girls) wore long brown or black stockings, wool plaid skirts or dresses .... At about seven or eight I had my tonsils removed..... (Edgecombe, " Little Leftie from Fort Vermilion")

There was no dental office in Fort Vermilion. Once a year in summer dentist would come downriver from Peace River. In order to underline the different concept of the degree of isolation and the consequent different rhythm of communication in the years up to WW11 and the impact of the large wartime megaprojects, he noted a childhood trip with his father to Edmonton: six days upstream to Peace River town on a freight hauling boat, then a three hundred mile Model A Ford trip to Edmonton that took three days, including several rescues from mud-holes. Mail arrived once a month in winter,hauled on river ice three hundred miles from Peace River town. Even after the war, communication was slow to improve. Gwyn Bailey's first year teaching in Ft. Vermilion in 1949 did replace the Model A Ford with the Northern Alberta Railroad as far as Peace River, but still required the O'Sullivan freight barge for three days and nights. She taught at Lambert Point School, a one-room log and mud schoolhouse that was seven miles from town.

Classroom management was no problem. Children were eager to learn. School had to be closed 3 times in 5 month term – fire, maurauding wolves and buffalo displaced by fire, bronchial flu – notes that the only people trained to deal with the outbreak were a nurse from the Catholic mission and a retired doctor from Edmonton, serving as Anglican minister in Fort Vermilion. (Mowat " A 1948 Northern Teaching Experience")

Even in such isolated areas the emphasis was upon upholding what was regarded as the classic writings of the Western tradition, though it may be the case that they were regarded as the route to the professions rather than to the study. Chalmers noted that If early Alberta high schools were characterized by a common programme, it is equally true that it was an academic one. The first course ever offered by any high school in this province has always been that which leads its followers to the door of the university or (formerly) to the normal schools . The smaller the school, the more surely would the academic pattern be the main and often the only one available. Even in mid-1950s the Composite model of high school had no representative north of Edmonton. (Chalmers, *Schools of the Foothills Province,* 152)

An individual perspective on this delayed and then accelerated timeline is provided by the experience from pupil to teacher of Ursula of a girl whose family emigrated from Germany to northern Alberta in the mid-1930s. She vividly describes the excitement of she and her sisters being the first students at the first community built school at Westmark (1938), close to Spirit River. It was thrilling, but no idyll. She noted the uneven quality of the instruction, the schoolyard bullying, the arduousness and sometimes danger of long walks to school, and of completing high school in Grande Prairie, not in a student dormitory but by being a mother's help in private homes. She went on to study for one year at Pembina Hall on U of A campus to gain a Junior 'E' Certificate to teach grades 1-9; then multiple years of night courses at Fairview with GPRC faculty to meet the new standard of a minimum 3yrs university for certification in 1970, and then one more year to meet the 4 yrs requirement by 1977. (Delfs, *To a Brighter* Future, 296-312). Another interviewee provided a parallel account of progression from one room school pupil to teacher.

When I went to school in the 40s, twenty miles north of Grimshaw, we began walking 4 or 5 miles, but only for a month or two and then we were directed to a school in the opposite direction and went by horse and wagon for about 7 miles ... Although many of those young women who went out to teach multiple grades were hard working and did a good job, I do not feel that my schooling was very good. Conditions, of course, were primitive and I remember leaving the school at noon, terribly thirsty, to run around the hamlet looking for a drink of water ... This was a pioneering district and we lived in log cabins our parents built, so the first schools

were of log, too. After high school Dolores received a $300 bursary to attend a one year course given by the Faculty of Education in Edmonton, with commitment to return to teach two years. She was assigned to Deadwood. *There was no paved road to the door. In fact our school was a number of miles off the gravelled highway to Manning. My roomate from Edmonton and I shared a small granary divided in half with a bed on one side and a table, cupboard and cookstove on the other. We were expected to cook and heat with coal with which neither of us had any any experience (* near*ly died one night from poisoning by coal fumes*). (Appleton, interview)

A thumbnail sketch of the delayed timing of the stages of many rural schools in the provincial north can be seen in of Elmworth school's transition from shack to consolidated high school and back to K-9 accompanied by annual campaigns to prevent closure. In 1919, as settlers crowded in on the just completed railroad and returning soldiers took advantage of the additional land allowances for veterans of WW1, the school began as a log shack on the homestead of " Diamond Dick" Harrington.(19. Nutting A Grande Education: One Hundred Schools in the County of Grande Prairie, 1910-1960, South Peace Regional Archives pp.49-50). In 1921 it had become a proper one-room school, with two rooms added in 1931. By the end of the 1930s high school classes were added and in 1948 it became a consolidated school with busses bringing pupils from former 4x4 school districts of Hazelmere, Craigellachie, Haven, Ravenswood, Itipaw, Rio Grande, and Cariboo. In 1955 there was additional expansion. An idea of the vitality of that time can come from a vivid picture painted from documents describing school life of neighbouring Halcourt school in the 1950s.

The children benefited from facilities in the community, playing basketball in the old hall and curling and skating in the curling rink. They also played ball with nearby schools in the fall and traveled to Beaverlodge for events such as the art show and the curling bonspiels. The curriculum incorporated weekly singing around the piano in the Junior Room, educational films, radio programs, lectures and slides on wildlife by Mr. Hamm, and the track meets in May. The Senior room performed one-act plays for the younger children. Social events included skating and tobogganing parties; the High School Curling Bonspiel and Bonspiel Banquet; Christmas, Valentine, Easter and Hallowe'en parties; Jr.
Red Cross Club and social evenings. The community joined the children for Mother's Day

events, Christmas concerts, the annual school picnic, and the Jubilee Celebration of 1955. (Nutting, *A Grande Education*, 68)

Then the fall in student numbers began until it is now fragile in the eyes of central office administrators who are bound by usage formulas from the provincial department. Some schools simply did not make it past the few years it took to discover that the land in that area was simply not sufficiently fertile. West End School opened in 1933 just as the Depression was beginning. Because of isolation and lack of money, it depended on practicum students from Normal School for its first teachers. But by 1935 there were only nine children and no teacher was hired, causing all the remaining families with children to leave the district and the school being closed. (Nutting, *A Grande Education*, 202)

Some memoirs capture the adventurous spirit required well into the 1950s to serve in the more northerly schools. Felicia Melnyk taught in 1955 at Canyon Creek (80 miles from High Prairie – connected by a dusty gravel road impassable in heavy rain or snow storms). The combined grade class was one third white, a few Cree, balance Metis students

The *main attraction was money. Salaries were slightly higher in northern schools, especially if northern allowances were added to the basic salary. Teachers were desperately needed all over the province at that time, and especially in the North. Adventure was another draw. I had always lived in cities and thought of a northern experience seemed very exciting. Perhaps too much Jack London!* (Melnyk, correspondence)

Even by the next decade new teachers from the south, such as Dennis and Marion Radke, could still feel isolated in the areas of the Peace Country that had been settled for half a century.

In those days there was such a teacher shortage, a beginning teacher could basically name the school and grade they wanted and most of the time it happened. (As an aside, teachers were in such demand that many foreigners were hired, sight unseen. In the school I was assigned to, the new vice-principal did not show up (coming from Africa), so my husband was appointed the vice-principal even though he was a new teacher and had only two years training. This happened even though there were many qualified people on staff, but they were all women) .... I was a little surprised ... that many parts of Grande Prairie had no sewers, so there were outhouses aplenty

.... there were very few paved roads in the city, so that when spring arrived, Grande Prairie became a very muddy community. People's cars got stuck in the mud on a regular basis.... I was able to connect with many of my students during the fifteen years I was in Grande Prairie. I was very pleased with the progress some of them made – former students are now doctors, lawyers, teachers. The memoir includes a note that would still be recognized by many who are now experienced and successful teachers. *However, some of my expectations had to be revised ..... During my first year of teaching, I had to teach music to a grade eight class during the last period on a Friday afternoon. I had... only a record player... the school was located in a lower class neighbourhood ... I would get home after school and on most Fridays I would have a good cry.* (Radke, correspondence)

Thus it has always been.

Even in the 1970s, when travel time was less, cultural distance could still be considerable. Katie Kokott was teacher-librarian in the Mennonite community of La Crete in 1973.

At first, I felt many of the male students were loud and always 'testing' the teacher, it improved somewhat. Some of the young female students were quiet and with time took part in discussions and were a joy to teach. Some students told me that I shouldn't be teaching, but having babies and in the kitchen!! Some were very proud to let us know when they turned 15/16 and were allowed to quit school and very loudly stomped out. Pictures were cut out and pages ripped out of books that were deemed unacceptable. That was quite a shock for me, raised in a family where books, magazines and the library were very important. (Kokott, correspondence)

Leslie Crawford also taught in La Crete in the late 70s. She had grown up in Calgary but wanted to 'get away from home'.

Being a naive city girl, I didn't have a lot of knowledge of a place such as La Crete. I viewed it as a fabulous adventure, as at that time there wasn't a bridge over the Peace River, I had to be flown in, while leaving my car on the north side of the river. I was very idealistic, and expected that all students would embrace what I had to teach them, and be culturally much the same as kids I had grown up with in the city .... my main teaching assignment was that of being the girls' PE teacher. .... Many of the old-colony Mennonite families held the belief that Physical

*Education represented competition and physical elements, and by association violence. They would thus refuse to allow their children across the threshold of the gym door. Other sects that were more moderate in their beliefs would allow their children to go into the gym and participate, but they were not allowed to change into gym shorts (and they didn't own sweats, etc.) They thus participated in their dresses with the gathered skirts .... few Mennonites were allowed to travel on Sundays, so any tournaments etc. were limited .... I remember making it to zone finals and not being able to field a team if the final game was on Sunday. (*Crawford, correspondence)

By the 1970s the one –room school period of northern education had ended at least a decade before and rural schools in northern Alberta had reached the same pattern as rural schools elsewhere in the province; staffed by subject and grade level specialist teachers operating in, at most, split-grade classrooms, supplemented by permanent facilities for physical activity, art, music, and vocational training).

6.

Teaching in a northern Native setting: the north is Another's country

a. The crisis in Native education

The title is an intended variation on the old saying, " The North is a Different Country". It is done in recognition of the indigenous peoples who first peopled the north and who, however marginalized in the 20th century, in the 21st century are insisting on their voices being heard in all decisions for their communities, especially schooling.

The First Nations crossed into the American continent twenty-five thousand years ago, using the Beringia land bridge along with other routes, moving south through Alaska, Yukon, and Alberta. Aboriginal peoples in northern Alberta today represent about 15% of the region's population, 100 times the provincial average of 0.15%. Northland School Division #61, the largest and most northerly school division in Alberta, was created in 1961 to especially serve this population. In November, 2010, the Northland School Division Inquiry Team report was tabled in the Alberta Legislature. As noted earlier, in January of that year the Minister of Education had dismissed the existing board of trustees out of frustration over the slow pace of academic improvement as measured by Provincial Achievement Tests, particularly at the Grade 6 and Grade 9 levels. High school completion rates were also much lower than the rest of the province and the Diploma Exam performance of students reaching Grade 12 level was very weak, so that few were completing sufficient subjects to be able to move on to post-secondary institutions.

Northland District learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy were weak, not only in comparison to general provincial levels, but also with respect to other FNMI students in other neighbouring school jurisdictions in northern Alberta. This may reflect a difference in impact on FNMI pupils of school-community relations in relatively isolated and homogeneous aboriginal

communities, as are typical of Northland, and those in communities more heterogeneous and more integrated into provincial transportation and economic grids. This is is only a comparison of 'success' in relation to the imperatives of the Euro-Canadian school model. It also recognizes that the employment and career structure of Canada requires credentialing from that dominant model. How then to build a new bridge, a new Beringia, that will provide genuine choice for aboriginal students to cross back and forth between two value systems for the benefit of their own life choices?

b. The challenge of tradition and change

There is an important issue to consider before proceeding further, one that is difficult to do other than estimate, yet it is key to the search for appropriate routes across this new Beringia. Just how much of traditional cultural values remain in northern Native society, perhaps especially among the young? Let's start with a paper written by a young northern Alberta Native, an undergraduate in an Introduction to Native Studies course, reflecting on his visits to his remote northern Cree community. It is worth quoting the student's words at some length.

The preadolescents identify role models from both the traditional members of the community and celebrities of popular media, showing they value both traditional and modern cultural influences. I could agree with these because of my personal experience from growing up on reserve, and observing both myself and those around me…. Even in my preadolescence I was happiest when in the wilderness, but it didn't mean I never watched movies…..However, now I go back and all I see with the preadolescents is baggy rapper clothes and lots of jewelry on the girls, obviously imitating their rapper and singer icons. Even in my own community the latest thing has been a skateboard park and now suddenly everyone has a skateboard and wears skateboard clothing while talking like skateboarders. The image you give off is the number one priority for a preadolescent and this is because they want to fit in and be '"cool"….. However this is all taken aback when I go to a pow-wow or my kokum's house and I see these same baggy rappers actually feeling the beat of the drum, or genuinely respecting their elders. Or even when I see someone take off his $100 G-Star shades to shoot a moose. It's these paradoxical moments

that most reassure me because in fear of a culture being lost, there is always those things that won't change. (Laboucan-Avirom,"Goose Hunt or Rap")

Hugh Brody, one of the most distinguished non Native anthropologists in the field of northern Canadian societies, asked – and answered – a series of related questions.

Do Inuit live in snow houses? …Do they hunt seals with harpoons? …Do they eat raw meat? …..A simple answer to all these questions is yes. Do northern hunting people live in prefabricated houses…Do they use high-powered rifles and telescopic sights?... Are northern hunting peoples dependent on cash and the local supermarket?...A simple answer to all these questions is yes…. We force a moral choice upon aboriginal peoples. We consign them to one of two possible categories: traditional or modern….This imposition of a traditional – modern dichotomy is irrational. All people live in both the past and the present. (Brody, *Living Arctic*, 171-175)

Of course, that still leaves the problem of identifying the mix of traditional and 'modern' cultural values and behaviours in any particular pupil, school class, or school community. As a general rule, school age children will be more influenced by the mores of the electronic universe than their elders, bearing in mind that traditional occasions will reinforce traditional behaviours, and the more isolated the community the sharper this difference will be. Balancing that tendency is a particularly important aspect of traditional Native life in the northern region of our province, compared to the central and southern portions. Whereas the traditional aboriginal system of production in the latter regions collapsed with the destruction of the buffalo in the 1870s, the aboriginal peoples of the northern region had already for a century adapted their traditional hunting and gathering system to accommodate trapping for furs and were able to sustain that into the middle of the 20th century. Given the essential relationship between the strength of any particular set of cultural values and the system of production which gives rise to them, the persistence of this modified but operational traditional system of production into the last fifty years in northern Alberta means that traditional cultural values will likely be more strongly present.

c. Schooling and the ethic of non-interference

The most fundamental aboriginal cultural value and key potential tripwire for matters of schooling and the classroom may be the aboriginal ethic of non-interference. According to Rupert Ross , former crown prosecutor in northern Ontario, this is probably one the oldest and one of the most pervasive of all ethics by which Native people live. (Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost,* 12-13) It essentially means that a Native person will never interfere in any way with the rights and activities of another person. One can speculate as to why this became so embedded a value. Perhaps the small scale of these pre-contact human societies, compared to the huge scale of the North American natural environment, encouraged this behaviour – some aboriginal version of Turner's frontier thesis. Perhaps it was a social strategy developed to reduce interpersonal conflicts during long northern winters, when small groups were confined together for long periods of time. Whatever the reason, it is significantly at odds with certain key behaviours that are deeply embedded in Euro-Canadian social culture and particularly the institution of the school. Canadian schools carry the birthmarks of the crowded, industrial, synchronous, hierarchical and top-down 19th century European societies from which they came. Granted that this has been leavened by creeds of 'child-centred education' and a sincere belief that operational arrangements are for the child's own good, they still remain places where direction is given and obedience is expected and required, whatever the child may otherwise wish. No institution in our society, aside from the justice system, so much embodies the ethic ' You shall do as you are told'.

To illustrate, take one of Rupert Ross's experiences as a crown prosecutor in northern Ontario. The case involved repeated vandalism of school buildings on a reserve, the culprit was an aboriginal student, and his father was being cross-examined for failing to control his son whom he knew was committing these acts. When challenged to describe what he had done to restrain his son , he answered " I hid his shoes". Rupert Ross believes that this level of interference, which was met with guffaws of derision in the courtroom, was as much as the father felt he could exert. Or the case of the parent being asked by the dentist who visited the reserve once a month to bring his children for a dental exam, responding that he would ask them if they wished to (Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost,* 16-18). Does a parallel exist between a parent forcing, or not forcing, an unwilling child to make their way to school and the low attendance rates of upper grades at schools in Northland? From the Euro-Canadian cultural point of view these could be viewed as examples of irresponsibility, evasiveness, or even downright pig-headedness, Yet from

the perspective of the ethic of non-interference they are all united by deep respectfulness for the autonomy and self-regard of the other person, even when one is sure that the actions being followed by the other are mistaken. As a corollary, one might observe a connection to a very impressive quality of politeness in traditional Native behaviours, since the most fundamental root of true courtesy is considerateness for the other person.

d. Schooling and learning styles

Next let us take and compare the Woodlands Cree pedagogical model with that of Euro-Canadian schooling. One author used the example of how she was taught by her mother to snare rabbits for both meat and skin. She stressed the repeated periods of silent yet mentally alert observation, followed by private practice in making, setting, and disguising the snares along the pathways through the woods until good enough to be actually be included in the family trapline. (Wheaton, " An Aboriginal Pedagogical Model") The article intended to show the importance of active observation, direct experience, and reflection, which are all important to modern education theories. Yet surely there are missing three key classroom behaviours that reflect strong Western cultural learning traits – the first is teaching and learning through active question and answer versus silent observation, the second ins organized group discussion and debate by students, and the third is the acceptability, indeed praiseworthiness, of taking a stab at doing something or attempting an answer in while being observed by the rest of the class, even though the outcome is almost certainly going to be imperfect. These widely used teaching approaches appear to violate the privacy of learning implicit in the traditional pedagogy.

e. Knowledge versus wisdom

Consider further the different concepts of knowledge and relationship between knowledge and wisdom assummed in the aboriginal and Euro-Canadian concept of what is most important to know. One aboriginal graduate reflected on her own jolting experience with government schools in Nunavik in northern Quebec, schools that were basically "outpost" versions of southern schools. The schooling of the camp imparted specific instrumental knowledge related to life role.

It also required practice in the moral qualities required in that role: courage for the warrior, patience and endurance for the hunter, neatness and taste in the maker of clothing. Knowledge was approached as the wisdom to fulfill one's life role with skill and character.

In our Native heritage, learning and living were the same thing, and knowledge, judgement and skill could never be separated. The Native way of teaching is holistic. When a young man is taught to hunt and be on the land, the technical skills...are taught at the same time as are the character skills of courage, respect, determination, persistence, and patience....The idea that personal wisdom was not necessary for survival never occurred to our people. (Watt-Cloutier, "Honouring our Past, Creating our Future")

The growing complexity of Western economies had made it impossible to organize schooling around a narrow selection of life roles. The specific knowledge for all the possible roles was far too diverse and particularized to be an organizing principle. Instead the most generalized literacy and numeracy skills were the foundation, completely abstracted from any specific future employment. Moral behaviour was emphasized as a desirable good in a context of requirements and expectations of Christian afterlife. Guilt and unworthiness were used as motivators. It was an appropriate schooling for an urban industrial population whose working life was to be a small synchronous part of a large system.

... it was natural for us to respect the newcomers who seemed to know how to survive and how to make their organizations work. Their power looked like wisdom.... We now know that it is a mistake to automatically assume that people who work for institutions have wisdom. Organizations can be very powerful, but they operate by dividing actions up into many small pieces....This means that life becomes much easier, but it also means that people may never understand the whole and never have a clear idea of what they are doing or why.... When the teacher is the land, patience usually works. Things can usually be figured out in time, so long as one is a careful observer....To this day this has not happened. There was no wisdom or independent judgement to be gained.... The learning of wisdom started to diminish, as did the ability to be independent in one world or another. (Watt-Cloutier, "Honouring our Past, Creating our Future")

Thus one of the greatest puzzlements for Native Canadians who had sought schooling so that their children would learn the supposed wisdom behind the power of the 'moniyaw' (white person).`

f. Linguistic misalignments

Then there are the everyday linguistic interactions between teacher and aboriginal student or her parents/guardians. Assume both sides are well-intentioned. What differences in language idiom and rhythm is it helpful for a non-Native teacher to be aware of? According to Ron and Suzanne Scollon , researchers on interethnic communication, the main problem is not caused by grammar but the assumptions that are conveyed by the patterning of words and communication. The importance of this issue increases in situations of interethnic communication that take place in contexts of unequal power, of which the classroom is one.

… we conclude that in any situation in which there is interethnic communication, but especially in gatekeeping encounters, there is serious potential for discrimination against the less powerful interactant, based on leakage from communicative style. (Scollon and Scollon, *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethnic Communication*, 5)

There are multiple opportunities for this 'leakage' to occur.

Consider the different readinesses of Native and non-Native to communicate when meeting for the first time: the non – Native thinks ' Let's talk and get to know each other'; the Native thinks ' Let's get to know each other, then we'll talk'. (Scollon and Scollon, *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethnic Communication*, 14-16) It is all in the differences in how we present ourselves to the other person, how the roles of talking and listening are distributed, even initiated, the conventions of interruption and exchange of speaker, how emphasis including emotional and interrogative overtones are conveyed, and finally the conventions of ending the conversation.

It is assumed by non-Natives that one should 'put one's best foot forward' when introducing oneself, so as to influence the llstener toward having a favourable view of ourself. The Native view is that self-promotion is improper and that one should avoid trying to manipulate the other

person’s perception. (Scollon and Scollon, *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethnic* Communication, 22) There are also implications of power and control in the readiness to initiate a conversation, since whoever begins the conversation chooses its subject and controls its development. This is reinforced by differences in the cues used by Native and non-Native to signal when the other person’s opportunity to speak. (Scollon and Scollon, *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethnic* Communication, 24-26) The English speaker pauses for one second or less; the Native Canadian for around one and a half seconds. The result of this syncopation is predictable. It is hard for the Native Canadian to see the opportunity to take a turn speaking, whereas the non-Native regards the other as lacking in ideas and opinions since they fail to take the opportunity to participate actively. In addition, Native Canadian interaction when it occurs is much less geared to back and forth exchange, even clash, of views, than to a succession of monologues that deliberately avoid engaging with each other, certainly not competing with or confronting one another. Euro-Canadians like to close conversations with a wish for a future encounter, implying pleasure in the just completed conversation. Native Canadians regard such statements as an interference with future actions and so may say nothing at all by way of wrap up, leaving the non-Native with an impression of dislike for any continuation of the relationship. (Scollon and Scollon, *Narrative, Literacy, and Face in Interethic* Communication, 26-27) Compound this with the difference in emotional coloration of speech between an inflected language like Cree and non-inflected English. The former relies on word structure – especially suffixes – to convey a questioning or surprised tone. The latter uses a wide range of intonation and word stress. The former appears passive and unemotional to the ear of the latter. Altogether there are myriad opportunities for misunderstanding.

g. High and low context communication

Differences exist not only in structure of speech, but also in what is assumed to be necessary content. This can be particularly important in a school setting, where matters of attendance are key issues. One writer described the challenge of classroom dialogue between Native pupil and Euro=Canadian teacher in terms of differing assumptions within ‘high context’ and ‘low context’ communications. (Taylor, “ Non-Native Teachers in Native Communities”) Think of it this way. If you live in a small community that has occupied the same location for many generations and

where family relatedness is extensive and where life roles, while meaningful, are limited, then you do not feel the need to supply a lot of contextual information when making a statement or expressing a view. Everyone knows the context. On the other hand, in a densely populated, mobile, complex and specialized economy, in order for communication to be accurate then a lot of context must be provided to ensure shared points of reference. In the situation of a student returning to school after an unexplained absence, the Native student may feel that the teacher ought to know about her family situation and thus to ask persistent questions about the absence is rude and aggressive. Conversely, the non-Native teacher may feel that the absent student did not take reasonable steps to inform the school and seems simply to expect to be caught up.

h. Punctuality and attendance

Rupert Ross identifies two other persisting Aboriginal cultural ethics: 'The Time must be Right' and ' Respecting Praise and Gratitude'. (Ross, *Dancing with a Ghost,* 34, 38-39) These can have the potential for an unsettling effect on the protocols of the school. The first relates to the perceived disconnect between punctuality and the old non-Native pejorative of 'Indian time'. The disconnect appears to arise out of the ethic ' The Time Must Be Right', which is appropriate to the variable conditions of a hunting and gathering system of production dependent on changeable weather and reflects conditions of scarcity that can make supper a moveable feast. On the other hand,, punctuality reflects the synchronicity required in an industrial system and also assumes conditions of plenty that can ensure that food will always be available for everyone to sit down to 6:00pm supper. The Canadian novelist Robert Kroetsch captured this difference in mental structure very powerfully.

If there is any single act that characterizes life in the North, it is the act of waiting....In the North, people wait through whole seasons for the freight to arrive; they wait for years for governments to make decisions; they wait for decades, or possibly centuries, for treaties to be signed. To wait is to alter violently the momentum and purpose of Western culture. A condition generates its own system, its own values, and waiting becomes an alternate culture that is rich in reflection and meditation, those forms of inaction that become versions of action; waiting is a recovery of the eternal into our obsession with linear time. And in that waitingness, the body

adapts itself, finding itself paradoxically in a version of space that is at once intimate and vast. (Kroetsch "A Likely Story", 19-20)

i. Ps and Qs

The second arises from the ethic Respecting Praise and Gratitude. It arises from different cultural expectations of obligation between Native and non-Native and can affect teacher-student relations over so small a matter as a student asking to borrow a pencil. The teacher provides it and awaits ' Thank you', to be responded to with the so Canadian ' You're welcome'. But no 'Thank you' comes, because of the ethic that reverses the obligation from the student as the one in need to the teacher as the one with resources to share; an ethic necessarily deeply grounded in the exigencies of different members of the extended family experiencing the variable fortunes of the traditional round of hunting and gathering. In other words, what is confusing to the non-Native is that the Native student seems to act as if expecting things to be given to the; what is confusing to the Native student is the the non-Native teacher does recognize the obligation arising from the capacity to assist.

All of the above are generalities that will be present in differing degrees from scarcely to strongly apparent in individual FNMI students. They are intended to provide possible governors on an instinctively negative Euro-Canadian teacher response to apparent pupil over-resentment of control, disinclination to participate in classroom discussion or student demonstration, unresponsiveness in conversation, lack of 'please and thank you', and irregular attendance. They are intended to demonstrate some of the cultural misalignments that can exist between community values and schooling values. None of these need be matters that require more than daily awareness and negotiation. If as teacher you try to be consistently friendly, systematic, and stimulating, then you cannot go far wrong. It also remains the case that the most significant kind of diversity encountered in all classrooms of pupils is not diversity of culture, but diversity of personality among the students themselves.

j.cross-currents of schooling

Yet none of this so far sufficiently explains the crisis of schooling in many northern Native communities, such as led to the drastic ministerial action described in the opening of this chapter. The main challenge is the apparent inertia that drags at individual efforts, whether by administrator, teacher, or pupil, to improve. Of course the term 'improve' is problematic, since it carries strong overtones of the higher good of non-Native educational values and the whole urbanized bourgeois socio-economic context to which they are adapted. A small story underlines this. A former director of Alberta Education told of a visit to a small isolated band school and an encounter with a religious sister who had been a teacher there for many years. She took him to the village graveyard and pointed to the grave of a young girl. A brilliant student, the best they ever had. They had sent her off to Edmonton for secondary school. She returned at Christmas, driven down by the prejudice she had encountered. She found herself rejected by her own peers for some of her acquired non-Native ways. She committed suicide. The religieuse asked hauntingly, " What are we trying to do?"(Brackenbury, personal communication, 2009)

The first factor in this tragedy is the prejudice encountered in the non-Native school community. This barrier was viewed by the educational historian Robert Carney as the factor missed by Harry Hawthorn in his highly influential ' Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada' in his advocacy of integration into public school systems. (Carney " The Hawthorn Survey 1966-1967, Indians and Oblates and Integrated Schooling") It is the second that brings into focus an element of community behaviour in the Native communities themselves that can pull back against strategies to raise academic achievement and school attendance: the effect of FNMI pupil need to identify with the common life expectation of their peers. What is meant here are not daily matters of dress and speech, but an acceptance of the appropriateness of sharing in the common fortunes – or misfortunes – of the group rather than individual enterprise. Noella Steinhauer, a Native teacher and school administrator on a small reserve in Alberta was acutely conscious of this.

… the beginning teacher on the reserve …. must realize that academic achievement and competition…. may be viewed negatively by other students if a given student is far ahead and set apart from the others. This attitude can be attributed to the fact that in traditional Indian society everyone is equal and has an equally important role to play. Unfortunately, it adversely affects

academic achievement of Indian children who must learn to live in a competitive society. (Steinhauer, "Native Viewpoint")

Sensitivity and responsiveness to the ethos of one's community can be an enhancing influence on schooling in a community imbued with hope and optimism about its collective future. In communities where lack of hope prevails, then the opposite schooling effects can occur. Steinhauer grew up in a reserve family who provided a stable, loving environment and encouraged her success at school and university. She perceived the opposite situation producing the opposite effect.

In my first year of teaching I realized my childhood was not like that of many of the students on this small reserve. I had to accept that most children on the reserve did not have a safe, stable home. My illusions were shattered when I learned that having warm clothing and getting enough to eat were a daily struggle for many of my students. (Steinhauer, "Native Viewpoint")

Such negative conditions are not universal among reserve communities or even within any single reserve community, but there tends to be an inertia. At times it may have seemed that this would never change.

*Arne summarized." So if I read you correctly, you're saying that what I have been hammering at is not an Indian problem specifically, but a poverty problem, that poverty is a way of life, that it is rooted in ineffectiveness, however derived, and that nobody really knows how you change life style. (*Fry, *How a People Die,* 153)

Yet what this author seems to be suggesting is that the root cause of any inertia was economic marginalization in the form of imposed or self-selected restricted participation in the mainstream workforce. It may be that such effective participation is the necessary condition for hope for the future for oneself or one's children. It is that hope for the future, that belief that schooling will in fact pay off, that is the required motivator for sticking through the multiple years of formal schooling, at least until high school graduation. It is adult unemployment and idleness that the principal of a school on a northern Metis Settlement sees as the de-energizing force in the students.

Today a 'welfare society' – nothing is done for its own sake, without reward, including school work. It represents a colonial mentality. (Price, interview)

If this be so, then it may have reinforced acquired behaviours already noted by a researcher comparing the cultural values of pre-school children in a traditional Cree community in northern Quebec in the 1960s with those learned in the boarding school.

(Cree) parents conceive of their children as developing gradually into responsible adults. Much of the children's play imitates the activities of their parents and, thus, rehearses adult roles…On the other hand, when they go to school, counsellors and teachers expect children to live in a world of play unrelated to their future participation in adult society… After only one year of school parents report that their children " only want to play" and are not interested in performing their chores… Prolonged residential school experience makes it difficult… for children to participate effectively in the hunting-trapping life of their parents… (and) they acquire new needs and aspirations which cannot be satisfied on the trapline. (Sindell " Some Discontinuities in the Enculturation of Mistassini Cree Children")

Now these children are themselves become parents and grandparents of the present school generation. To the lessons in irresponsibility is now added the collapse of the hunting-trapping life of their parents and the live cultural values it supported. Add in the forms of abuse of self and other that travelled home to take the place of that culture, along with the resort to binge drinking as an escape, compounded by perceived low opportunities for success in the dominant non-Native society; the outcome is a real condition of school-community relations that will not actively take itself to school. This is the greatest crisis facing Canadian schooling today.

k. Moving ahead

It will require all of society to repair this situation, as has begun to occur. In 1999, following his role as lead researcher on the residential school system for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples from 1991-1996, John Milloy gave the title *A National Crime* to his findings, his focus was on the responsibility of the federal government. There is a wider implication to the term 'national' , however. Systemic discrimination and unemployment, responsibilities of the whole

national society, are the reasons why the residential school traumas became inter-generational. A healthy culture – one that has the capacity to adapt as well as conserve – is built and sustained on the basis of participation in a viable system of production, on opportunity to build a genuine working life.

The scale and duration of the programs for economic development that are required are far beyond the scope of any school in our provincial north. How then is this information intended to serve in promoting hiring and retention of new teachers for northern Alberta? It is intended to provide an accurate description of real need and challenges, so that those who step forward shall do so with a deep breath as well as the necessary mix of idealism to serve and career self-interest. While we wait for large national and provincial initiatives to take effect, presently identify and identify with those students and their families who do wish to take advantage of schooling to access whatever productive career they may hope for. And it must be real schooling, of the kind measured by PETs, even trailing all the problematic issues of 'privileged' knowledge that they do. All of the public statements of northern bands say this – in the face of inclinations to 'reasonable accomodation' by many educationists.

…we have gone…to the extreme of a system that challenges our youth so little that it undermines their intelligence…..The watering down of programs, the lowering of standards and expectations is a form of structural racism that we must make every attempt to stop. There is a balance of respect and challenge that can be met, and we must make it a priority to find it. Academic standards and rigour have been lowered in the name of respect for the "different learning styles" of Aboriginal peoples. Certainly there are cultural differences and value systems that must be respected at every level. However, these kinds of generalizations must be used with caution…. People do not learn the most significant things unless they are challenged. Parents and educators often see student success as being the most important thing. Institutions such as schools are good at providing success, and they can often do that by simply reducing the challenge… Easy successes are not worth much in human development terms. (Watt-Cloutier, "Honouring our Past, Creating our Future")

This may be the true nature of the new Beringia, for non-Native teachers as well as Native students, according to the experience of one such young female who taught in a First Nations community school in the early 1990s.

I had an aunt who'd worked in Social Services in Edmonton, who told me about serious issues in ….. (a First Nations community) . poverty, unemployment, violence, substance abuse, and the kids were taking the brunt of it all. Still, I hoped it would be a quaint back-water in need of understanding .... I am a white, middle class teacher's daughter. I grew up in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where the University and provincial government were just down town. I had nothing in my experience to prepare me for teaching Dene Tha children. As a young woman (22 years old) I was really nervous about being good enough. I wanted to love them, to give them my very best, but I had serious misgivings. Being a first-year teacher, though, I believed I could overcome the cultural differences with sensitivity and creativity. I am a gentle person and I naively believed that I could reach the kids that way .... My hopes to reach the kids with my gentle spirit were soon dashed. My ethno-centric, White-man gentleness was not in their vocabulary. I really lacked the cultural understanding and the maturity to be much good for them. I had one young lad whose name was N......... By the end of his year in first grade with me, he still did not know what an N was. I had a six year old ask me how to keep a baby from falling off a couch, because he was left in charge of his infant sister. I took a sharpened screw driver from a five year old. One of my six year olds was caught smoking behind the school . I soon was washing chewing-tobacco from the faces of my first-graders. The rich culture was drowning in poverty and everything that goes with it .... My first two years of teaching were not what I had hoped for when I enrolled in college. The place was full of young, first-year teachers or those who were passed over at transfer-season. A few, dedicated master teachers were there, but they were at the end of their careers and were replaced by first year kids when they did retire. I was living in …..seventy kilometres away, and commuting every day ... The first time I turned off the Mackenzie Highway into……., a burned-out shell of a mobile home greeted me. The teacherages were a little further in, and they looked like third-world tenements to my middle-class eye .... I felt like I was on another planet. The drive home every night was coming back to Earth, the drive in every morning was one of dread. . I managed to survive, by simple youthful stubbornness, but I was certainly not what those kids needed. I am actually considering returning at the end of my career, when I feel I'd be able to do some good. Sort of redemption, I suppose. (Edey, correspondence)

Yet in that same region is the successful school of Rocky Lane. Perhaps what makes it successful is that the school itself is a community serving yet independent of the adjacent reserve,

homestead community and old Metis settlement. Linda Chesnutt arrived from Nova Scotia 32 years ago and has taught English there for all that time.

What I found when I arrived here was a real gem in the world of education. Rocky Lane is a plucky, difficult, and determined K-12 school of about 200-250 students, 1/3 white, 1/3 native, 1/3 non status somewhere in between. This school was fully integrated with its culturally diverse the population, and 30 years ago, racism was non-existent. This community had lived and worked together for a number of generations and while each group did have its own persona, they were very interconnected and very equal. The school had a long tradition of success and while it has recently struggled through upheavals, it had a clear focus of what education meant and where it as a community of learners was going. (Chestnutt, correspondence)

I have rarely found a school that better represents John Dewey's hope in *Democracy and Education* (1916) that the school shall show society a model of how to live together. When choosing between despair and hope, one chooses hope and moves ahead.

7.

Northern residential schools: the evolution of the institution

a. The long delay in storytelling

It is only in the last twenty years that anything like the full story has emerged of the residential school experience for many Native Canadians. Even in this second decade of the 21st century the Commission on Reconciliation is still criss-crossing the land collecting evidence from individual survivors. The reasons for that long delay are connected to the on-going issue of low representation of Aboriginals on university faculties and differences in ways of authenticating evidence between European and Aboriginal (Mihesuah and Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy,* Introduction; Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, Introduction) Nonetheless, there had been awareness of criticisms and abuse before this, but it had always been blunted in academic and mainstream public discourse before this by a defensiveness about the perceived motives of the Euro-Canadian society, as in this statement by Webster Grant, regarded as the dean of church history of Canada.

Despite well recognized weaknesses, Indian education should not be judged solely on the basis of occasional horror stories …. Despite its shortcomings, the residential school evidently met a need p.183. The objective was to create a controlled environment, for, as one missionary candidly stated of the children, ' it is necessary to have complete control of them to do permanent work'. It would be unfair to judge such a remark, and many others like it, by today's standards …. the churches were only seeking to achieve a degree of control over Indian behavior that they had long sought to exercise in Canadian life as a whole. (Grant, Moons of Wintertime : Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter Since 1534, 189*)*

Since its publication in 1984 there has been an erosion of the self-forgivenness of that view. Indeed there now seems to be an uncomfortable – for Euro-Canadians – whiff of ambient racism about the circumstance that it was only after the public outcry over the 1989 revelations about abuse of non-Native orphans at Mount Cashel Orphanage in Newfoundland by the Christian Brothers that the Canadian public seemed ready for Phil Fontaine's testimony of his own agony and that of others of his people in the Indian Residential Schools of Canada.

b. Issues of 'voice'

All of this raises questions about the authority of this author to write about these matters. Insofar as this book is principally intended to serve in the preparedness of non-Native teachers for northern service that may include Native communities the issue of authority is perhaps less pointed. But it remains that the contents of this and the two remaining chapters shall be open to commentary and challenge by members of the Native community. This may be particularly the case in any remarks that appear to qualify the deserved opprobrium of the residential school experience on the basis of differences in time or place within the north or raise an uncomfortable caution about too great a weight being placed on the residential school system alone for present injustices upon and pathologies within northern Native communities and their schools.

c. Aboriginal ethos of schooling

The very concept of 'schooling' carries such connotations of ordinariness for us today that it takes effort to grasp the degree of difference in perceptions of 'schooling' between the aboriginal culture of northern Alberta and the incoming Euro-Canadian culture. It was genuinely epic, no matter the small scale of human numbers involved on each side in a region that even today the rest of the world would regard as largely isolated wilderness. Long before Peter Pond became the first European to enter northern Alberta in pursuit of fur in 1783, the First Peoples of northern Alberta had evolved their own form of education. It is important at this point to note the differences, and the causes of the differences, between the schooling within the aboriginal societies that Peter Pond encountered and the European society from which he came. The high

level of adaptation that northern aboriginal societies had made to their natural environment created a balance that had been maintained for millennia . Few roles were required to maintain that balance, but they were vital. In these non-hierarchical societies it was the responsibility and only responsibility of all members to maintain and transmit the role specific moral qualities, knowledge and skills that would enable their small scale human enterprises to maintain balance with nature's annual provision. Repetition of traditional behaviours and learnings invented to survive in and make sense of this part of our natural world had continued unchanged for millennia.

'Tradition' is the name we give to cultural arrangements and spiritual beliefs that have been found to be effective in achieving and maintaining a certain state of things in the past. 'Traditional societies' is the term we use for cultures who have maintained these arrangements and beliefs into the present, and 'schooling' is the medium for these messages.

Long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indians had evolved their own form of education. It was an education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the land was seen as the mother of the people. Members of the community were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that each child learned how to live a good life. Central to the teaching was the belief in the sacred, the Great Spirit….The development of the whole person was emphasized through teachings which were often shared in storytelling. Each group of First Nations has its own legendary hero through which much learning was transmitted, including Raven…and Wesakachak. They were regarded as transformers or " tricksters of learning", through which children learned such traditional values as humility, honesty, courage, kindness and respect….Traditional education was inextricably linked with economics. Learning was for living – for survival….Through observation and practice, young children learned the art of hunting, trapping, fishing, food gathering and preparation, child rearing…and building shelters….Very early in the lives of chlldren, the role the child would play as an adult was determined….(and) training continued until the person was

regarded as ready to perform his or her function.(Kirkness, *First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles*, 5-8)

In such arrangements for transmitting the knowledge, skills, and values to maintain the social enterprise the learner's relationship to the learning was direct and obvious. Educational theorists today properly point out the generic skills of mathematics, language, science, health, social studies and physical education embedded within the application of traditional aboriginal training in rabbit snaring, for example. (Kirkness, *First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles,* 8-9). That said, the end point remained clear: to learn how to snare a rabbit, in order to help sustain a small community in the context of the northern woods. This is quite different from arrangements for a multi-year, sustained effort to build up a generalized grasp of the content of decontextualized fields of knowledge, from which all the roles required in an industrial society were drawn. One only has to recall how many times teachers today still have to deal with the student challenge " Why do we have to learn this?" to realize how much more unreal this would be to an aboriginal child recently from her camp in the woodlands. It is important to note not only the difference in curriculum but in the relationship between the pedagogues and learners in these respective arrangements. In aboriginal society the adults playing the role of teacher did not directly teach but exemplified,; did not directly admonish but allowed personal failure by the student to teach its own lessons. In a word there was the absence of that clash of will and open inequality of power between teacher and student which is the dark element within the heart of the classroom experience of the Euro-Canadian school even today. When to that is added the spiritual hubris of the evangelical movements, both Catholic and Protestant, of the mid 19th century then one can expect, whatever the intentions, that epic quality of mutual misunderstanding, made malignant in time through a difference in power, that will mark the administration of Native schooling for the next hundred years to mid 20th century.

It was as if the aboriginal societies themselves stood within a timeless place outside history, for history is Western concept and is defined above all as change, with stages of civilization defined by increasingly complex techniques of material growth, social control, and artistic expression. If

the millennial cultures of hunting/gathering society represented perfect adaptation to unadapted nature, civilization arose from the response to imbalance with environment. In the process they invented the Western concept of history, which is the record of human change. Only from this perspective, perhaps Aboriginal culture might, in comparison, be viewed as not a culture of history, but a culture of memory. Only from this perspective, Aboriginal experience changed from memory to history with the contact with Europeans, a contact whose effects were felt in trade and disease even before the first face to face meeting with Peter Pond in the Athabasca country of northern Alberta, the Eldorado of the fur-trade.

d. European ethos of schooling

Peter Pond in his individual enterprise reflected an inegalitarian hierarchical society in rapid transition from agricultural settlements supporting a network of country towns with a few embryonic cities to a national commercial economy on the edge of large scale industrialization and globalization through empire. Indeed it deserves emphasizing that the society represented by Pond and which was within a century to utterly transform traditional aboriginal society derived the raw power to do this as a result of a brutal transformation of itself that had wiped out centuries of peasant subsistence farming and emptied the villages of England through the enclosure movement. The commercial and industrial power of Euro-Canadian civilization was built on crushing change within the life of its own people. The complexity of functions, both administrative and technical, in such industrialized and imperial societies required a range of roles far beyond the usefulness of training for a handful only. In the Western societies emerging into commercial and industrial economies, the mix of voluntary schools and family education in the home, the field and the workshop were no longer adequate. Systems of national public education, the 'legatee institutions' of John Dewey, were called into existence and would be based on the new industrial factory model . The effect was a preview of the far greater reordering of traditional views of reality in the aboriginal societies encountered in the nineteenth century colonial reach of Western nations.

Modern states engaged with their citizens in entirely new ways…. The crucial precondition was that literacy become general. The effects of this cultural revolution were profound. For example, mass literacy began the process of "disenchanting" the world by undermining the authority of traditional, often semi-magical, forms of thinking. In this way mass education helped spread a different worldview – if not a rigorous understanding of modern science, then at least a certain skepticism about nonscientific maps of reality. (Christian, *Maps of Time,* 431)

What would they require of the child student depended on the family's position in that hierarchy: acquisition of the persistent aristocratic model of schooling in the classical humanities for the children of the governing class; an introduction to new knowledge in science, mechanics and mathematics for the managers of the new economy; and habituation to obedience, punctuality and respect for those in authority accompanied by basic literacy and numeracy for the children of the working class. In addition, morality became subordinate to technique, whether of decision-making or production of goods. It was to be one of the greatest puzzles for aboriginal peoples in northern Alberta, who had believed that their children would benefit from the wisdom that must surely accompany the training schemes of the Euro-Canadian society that seemed to be master of so many things , that moral behavior in the residential schools was narrowly defined as a kind of Christianity that lacked the humility to have respect for the Other.

e. Early schooling in the fur-trade era

This malignancy did not occur from the beginning of schooling arrangements in northern Alberta. Almost a whole century passed from the first fur trade contact between Native and non-Native in northern Alberta in the late 18th century to the establishment of Holy Angels School, the first residential school located in our provincial north at Fort Chipewyan in 1874, and even the first half century of that school may not fit the later oppressive model. Two things are worth noting about these early forms of contact, because they affected the nature of the small initiatives in schooling that occurred before the major residential school period in northern Alberta beginning after Treaty #8 in 1899. The first is that the personnel within and the operations of the fur trade represented only a sliver of Euro-Canadian society and economy: one that was entirely

male, accustomed to being transferred from post to post during their residence in the northwest, and whose members assumed that at the end of their service they would end any personal ties and return to the part of North America or Great Britain from which they had been recruited. The fur-trading companies they represented – become only one company, Hudson Bay Company, after 1821 – were focused on commercial success. As fur-merchants their focus was on altering the traditional life of the aboriginal people of northern Alberta only so far as they could be persuaded to incorporate trapping more significantly into their traditional cycle of harvesting, though it needs noted that some historians believe this by itself brought considerable change in values. The second is that from the beginning of the fur trade in the northwest a third people were present – the Metis – who moved between the worlds of their aboriginal mothers in the Native camp and their Euro-Canadian fathers in the trading posts. By century's end and the signing of Treaty #8 the Metis would choose Treaty or Scrip, with little thought being given to their children being increasingly compelled to attend residential school on the one hand or become increasingly marginalized objects of prejudice in the developing public school systems of the homesteaders on the other.

Before 1899 it might be preferable if the original name, 'boarding school', the one used in most official correspondence of the period, might be used in place of 'residential school'. The latter term has come to carry such emotional weight that it is difficult for the historian to suggest different proportions of voluntarism versus compulsion or child welfare versus child privation or cultural respect versus racism or kindness versus cruelty that appear to have occurred at different stages and different locations of schooling for aboriginal children in northern Alberta. This is especially the case in the period before the churches became the official agents of the state for carrying out the educational clauses of Treaty #8. Nor should it be assumed that all Aboriginal children experienced residential school. The adoption of this agency for as their manner of meeting the commitments of the treaty followed a long tradition of relying upon churches to provide basic schooling in Europe, including England. It also should be noted that not until 1873 was the first Elementary School Act passed in that country to provide publicly funded secular education, and even then only for the elementary years. In parallel with that, teacher training as a professional training program was in its infancy in the late 19th century. By the time of

establishment of missions in the Canadian northwest, it was the OMI(Oblagtes of Mary Immaculate) who represented the administrators and Sisters of Poverty as the teachers (with Sisters of Charity or Grey Nuns in Fort Chipewyan and Fort Vermilion) in the Catholic missions, while Anglicans, Methodist, and Presbyterian staffed the Protestant institutions.

The first Native children of northern Alberta to be exposed to European models of schooling to any degree were some of the Metis children of French-Canadian or Scottish fur traders, usually belonging to North West Company, and before the forced union with the Hudson Bay Company in 1821. To such degree as occurred at all, it was more commonly Metis boys with Scottish fathers who might be sent away to schools at Red River Colony or even more exceptionally to Scotland, in order to return with such skills and knowledge as would enable them to rise within the ranks of the trading company. The family of Alexander Ross is the most striking example of this. With the takeover by HBC and the increasing domestication of that company's operations, including the increasing provision for Euro-Canadian wives to accompany husbands to northern postings, such relationships and the promotions they sought, became fewer and fewer. The 'managerial' element within the Metis involvement in the fur trade declined, as the Metis became increasingly identified with either the trapper or the labourer role, and in turn identified increasingly with the aboriginal culture of the mother. The HBC did provide some schooling through Anglican and Methodist missionaries at their main forts on the Bay itself, but nothing beyond that. There was, however, one great gift that came out of these efforts, provided by one of these early missionaries to the provincial north, James Evans of Norway House. It was particularly to the Cree, who had become the dominant Native people of the northern woods, and it was the invention of Cree syllabics. Missions in northern Alberta were small affairs indeed in this period before Treaty#8 and wholly voluntary with regard to enrolment. George McDougall, Methodist missionary, established the first 'residential' school (date?) in Western Canada at the Victoria Mission, just north of present day Edmonton, with his own children, those of another missionary, Steinhauer, a Native convert, and a few orphan Native children.

The first- and longest lasting – of all residential schools in Alberta's north, Holy Angels Indian Residential School, began operations in 1874 in Fort Chipewyan, under the administration of the OMI, with Grey Nuns as teachers. Even here, however, it is important not to accelerate the change toward severity and compulsion and cultural disparagement now so attached to the residential school experience. A study of the student experience of Holy Angels IRS for the first fifty years of its existence suggests that privations were shared between staff and students and no pattern of physical abuse. (Carney " The Grey Nuns and Children of Holy Angels") If this is so, then it may be that part of the reason is the slowness with which reserves were established in different parts of northern Alberta following Treaty #8 in 1899-1900. Somewhat like public schools today with their attendance boundaries and catchment areas, it was the sequestration of Treaty Indians on reserves in the central and southern areas of the prairie provinces that created the control spaces for the collection of children for required attendance at residential schools. The further north, generally the later the establishment of reserves. The further north also, generally the less available to church school authority were the NWMP/RCMP as instruments of compulsion. The passage of time did , however, wear away at such early concessions in control as isolation and distance permitted, until early differences became more blurred in a general emotional coldness that seems to be the most widespread character of the residential school experience in the north.

f. Assimilation: enduring objective

In order to best gauge the particular patterns of Native residential schooling as it occurred in northern Alberta, it is necessary to begin with an overview of the general character of the mature residential school system that developed in western Canada. The full blown system was characterized by disparagement of aboriginal culture in general and emotional, if not physical, violence against the children of that culture in particular. One source of that behavior was the missionary conviction that the Christianization of children justified policies of seizure, isolation, and deculturation of these children.

The hubris that accompanied such an outlook viewed the most appropriate future for the aboriginal peoples of Canada as one of allowing their children to be trained to find a humble place within the dominant economy and culture. It was this cultural imperialism that infused the statement of Duncan Campbell Scott to his superiors in 1927, although in light of the systemic mortality among students in the unhealthy conditions of the schools a casual reader may be pardoned for thinking that an even more cruel physical genocide was intended.

I want to get rid of the Indian problem….Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada who has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question…. Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs 1913-1932. (Quoted Titley, *A Narrow Vision,* 50)

This view persisted well past the mid-point of the 20th century. The policy of cultural imperialism then became more muted, but the broad objective of assimilation remained. Twenty years after Scott's memorandum, in 1947, Diamond Jenness, perhaps the most prestigious Canadian anthropologist alive at the time, whose studies of aboriginal societies in Canada are still cited, presented a report to a committee of the Canadian parliament entitled " A Plan to Liquidate Canada's Indian Problem in 25 Years", aimed at ending the legal distinctiveness of Indians. In 1963, the Report of the First Interprovincial Conference on the Schools of the Forest, hosted by Northland School Division, itself founded two years before to serve the Native bands of northern Alberta noted the address by the representative of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. His talk on the 'Sociology of Native Canadians" used three different categories relating to stages of integration: 'marginal man', 'transitional man', and 'integrated man'. Most famously, in the 1969 White Paper, the government of Pierre Trudeau proposed to end the separateness of Indians embodied in the Indian Act and the Treaties. The rationale was that it was the persistence of legal distinctions that provided the opportunity for discrimination. All of non-Native Canada was confused when Native organizations rejected this on the ground that they wished to remain Indian. It took some time for the implications to be realized. Two decades later the 'existing rights' of Canada's aboriginal peoples were recognized in Canada's

Constitution and the phrase ‘ First Peoples’ had been created, to take a distinctive place alongside the nation’s official commitment to a policy of multiculturalism. The costs, however, to contemporary aboriginal culture of the decultured schooling provided for their children for the previous one-hundred years remain. Not to think that echoes of earlier views on the desirability of assimilation are still not heard.

. …“ obliterating” various traditions is essential to human survival. Conservation of obsolete customs deters development, and cultural evolution is the process that overcomes these obstacles …. So, oral cultures are “stolen” from pre-literate societies when they learn to write, as are creation myths when they are faced with the scientific theory of evolution. (Widdowson , *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry,* 25)

Such views have a long history and are still part of our tangled debate on ‘identity politics’ today.

The assimilative nature of future government arrangements for aboriginal schooling was evident before the residential school design was itself adopted. The Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the immediate post-Confederation Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 both aimed to entirely remove all legal distinctions between Indian and non-Indian through the process of enfranchisement. The original design derived from the recommendations of the Davin inquiry in 1879, appointed by Prime Minister Macdonald to recommend how the new federal government of Canada might fulfill the educational component of the direct relationship of the British Crown with the First People of Canada. His recommendations were based on an admiration for the objective of “ aggressive civilization” being pursued in the industrial school model for aboriginals being pursued in the United States in the period after the Civil War. He believed that Christianity was at the core of the superiority of Western culture and that this suggested religious personnel as the most fitting instructors.

It must be obvious that to teach semi-civilized children is a more difficult task than to teach children with inherited aptitudes, whose training is, moreover, carried on at home. Missionary instructors were essential. The advantage of calling in the aid of religion is, that there is a chance of getting an enthusiastic person with, therefore, a motive power beyond anything pecuniary remuneration could supply. (Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision,* 102)

The residential school was the ultimate pedagogical instrument for the widely supported wish of the Euro-Canadian citizenry, expressed through their national government, that the 'Othernesss' of aboriginal Canadians be gradually brought to an end by the assimilation of their offspring. The young were to be made over in basic knowledge, behavioural values, and above all, in religious belief, into a version of working class Christian Anglo-Canadians ready to function humbly in a commercial economy. The perceived cultural gulf to be crossed, however, required something more than day school. It required the separateness of a boarding school that isolated the child from the human surroundings of her aboriginal culture and literally faced the entering child with a different ethnicity and culture in physiognomy (the beardedness of the priests must have been startling for a small aboriginal child) and dress (how often in transcripts of interviews with former students one comes across the use of the image of ' swooping black crows' to recall the appearance of nuns in their cowelled habits), and embodied in physical structures that dominated whatever traditional aboriginal space they now occupied.

g. Dominating the landscape

We should not underestimate the atmosphere of dread that was associated with the dominance, both architecturally and psychologically, of these buildings. The key psychological trauma for the children, whether placed therein at the request of or in opposition to the wishes of the parents and extended family was that they became as if swallowed up for ten months of the year, from childhood to mid-teens, in these huge, dark, multistory buildings that sat like alien presences in the lakeside clearings of the northern forest. Imagine the continuing anxieties of first school attendance for young children today and then multiply it by every quality of strangeness, coldness, both physical and emotional, and inability to understand the language of instruction

and control. Once enclosed within the school walls the aboriginal child was pushed and shoved into a routine that was highly regimented, completely different from the natural rhythm of camp life varied by the seasons and infused with indirect yet caring supervision.

With the same quaiity of enforcement used toward children of rural immigrants in the early factories of Britain's industrial revolution a generation before, the children within the residential school were broken into their role in the synchronized, repetitive schedule felt necessary for the organized activity of large numbers of children under the supervision of relatively few adults. Imagine once again how much still today, with whatever degree of 'child-centredness' we try to invest our schooling arrangements, our public schools continue to be based on a model of top-down decision-making, so that a relatively few adults can supervise and instruct a much larger number of children and young people. Now, however, take away from the child in this situation any habituation, through family example and early imitative activities, of the normalcy of such a dictated routine. Replace the learning context of the sound of the trembling aspen and the sight of an endless forest horizon with the sound of a clanging bell and the sight of enclosing walls. Make the learning by observation and imitation of the skills of the hunter, the gatherer, the preparer of foods and clothing, be dismissed as valueless beside the skill of repeating the phrases of the religious liturgy, and one gains a sense of what needs to be acknowledged as especially frightening for aboriginal children.

h. The routine

There were skills taught at the residential schools, but they were not the skills of camp. They were only apprenticeship in the basic practices that sustained the residential school itself – working in the fields that provided the vegetables and root crops, or working in the laundry or kitchen that provided the clothing and the meals – and that were the other part of the 'half-day plan' by which the students were expected to spend as much time in this kind of manual labour as in conventional academics. The main reason for this was underfunding by the federal government, an ongoing condition protested against by the churches running the schools, yet not protested so much as to give up control of the system that provided a human field to proselytize.

The other reason was the low estimate placed on what level of schooling was appropriate for the children of aboriginal communities. it is worth noting the views of the founder of public education in Canada, Edgerton Ryerson, first Superintendent of Schools in Upper Canada in the decades before Confederation itself. In 1847, the superintendent general for Indian Affairs in Upper Canada asked Ryerson to prepare a report that recommended strategies of Native education. He proposed the same kind of basic training in literacy and numeracy, along with forming habits of punctuality and obedience to authority, for Native as for non-Native children. He thought it impractical to provide trades (skilled vs unskilled) training. Any aboriginal child showing such promise should be apprenticed to a tradesman. He classed Native children alongside the children of the lower laboring classes in Euro-Canadian society as having limited mental potential and thus requiring a strong emphasis on religious instruction to prevent backward sliding into immorality.

… they are schools of learning and religion; and industry is the great element of efficiency in each of the these…as to the objectives of these establishments I understand them not to contemplate anything more in respect to intellectual training than to give a plain English education adapted to the working farmer and mechanic. (Milloy , *A National Crime,* 16)

Ryerson revealed a class consciousness as least as strong as any cultural prejudice, in believing that both Natives and the Euro-Canadian laboring classes had a propensity to sin because of low mental development and that only a strong emphasis on religion could overcome this. Whereas, however, Ryerson’s foundational ideas for public education in Canada were to be modified by successive educational leaders and theorists, the arrangements for Native schooling after Confederation became only more rigid and institutionalized over the next one hundred years of residential schooling.

i. The evolution of compulsion

The element of compulsion created the condition for all other wrongs. In 1894, at the general request of the church leaders in the West, and in particular Father Lacombe, the federal government changed the Indian Act to permit compulsory school attendance, but it was not mandatory across the whole system and enforcement was uneven and intermittent. Within a decade of that change, by the beginning of last century, the bureaucrats within the federal Indian Affairs Branch within the Department of the Interior were concluding from the criticisms received from Indian Agents in the field that the residential school design was not succeeding in their assimilative purpose as projected and that they should be phased out in favour of day schools. The churches were universally resistant, however, and by 1914 the government was preoccupied with the Great War. It was in the period between the two world wars that attendance was made compulsory, even then with widespread omissions of enforcement due to isolation of bands and limited numbers of attendance officers, often weakly supported by an RCMP who gave this role a low priority. Such numbers as did increase within the residential schools were now receiving even less per student funding than before due to the government economies of the Great Depression, followed by further neglect in the overwhelming emphasis on the war effort of World War II. It was the most recent period following World War II that elicited the darkest face of church run residential schools. Ironically it was a postwar measure intended to represent some degree of social justice that was to create conditions that increased the risk of harm to students– emotional, physical, and sexual – that had always been present in the residential school system. That measure was the extension of the Family Allowance Act of World War II to cover descendants of aboriginal signatories of the treaties. The extension had a condition attached, again reflecting the unreflective assumptions of the dominant society about Euro-Canadian schooling as a 'good'. Aboriginal parents would only receive these transfer payments if their children, as noted in the annual reports of the Indian Agents, were registered in school and would have them withdrawn if the children were not returned at the beginning of each school year. This created an immediate bulge in residential school population during the very post-World War II decades in which the federal government was transferring funding from residential to day schools, while the numbers and quality of entrants to the religious orders was dropping in an increasingly secular society, creating a situation in the residential schools of increased enrolment, reduced funding, and a declining quality of staffing. It was a 'perfect storm' for harm to occur.

j. Abuse

In 1990 in a national television broadcast,Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, publicly broke the silence on sexual and physical abuse at residential school. Subsequent personal testimonials of cultural disparagement, emotional coldness, disciplinary harshness, and sexual abuse have confirmed the condemnation of the residential school regime for aboriginal students. J. R.Miller carried out the first major scholarly study of these cruelties.

Discipline, always strict in residential schools, too easily deteriorated into severity and even abuse. Prior to the1960s the use of corporal punishment was common…representing a background of violence towards children that was endemic to the larger society….The arbitrary and unpredictable use of physical violence in the guise of discipline and correction was disturbingly common in the residential schools…To violence and arbitrariness must be added staff's widespread use of humiliation of the students…Then there were the outright sadists and the people who found it necessary or pleasurable to exert their power over small children by the use of force….Some infractions, such as repeated truancy and theft, often provoked excessive punishments. (Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision,* 324-326)

The violation of personhood through individual experiences of sexual abuse brought Miller to the edge of scholarly detachment.

The denial and covering-up of another major form of child abuse, sexual exploitation, lasted until the autumn of 1990. Then, in the wake of revelations of sexual abuse of non-Native orphans by Christian Brothers at Mount Cashel Orphanage in Newfoundland, attention began to focus on residential schools. When Phil Fontaine, chief of the Assembly of Mantitoba Chiefs, spoke out about his own mistreatment by Oblate clergy at Fort Alexander school in Manitoba, light was thrown on a dark corner of the history of these school…. difficult to assess precisely is the extent

of sexual abuse in the residential schools. One problem is calculating the significance of former students who are either silent about abuse or vociferous in denying that it occurred to them, or, sometimes, even to others in the schools they attended….Silences also emanate from the official sources on the schools….but some specific inquiries have turned up evidence of pervasive abuse at at least some schools….There must be a special place in Hell for those who abused their power over children in this way. (Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision,* 326)

Miller also found evidence of abuse of younger by older stronger students. There are records of pederasty occurring in other boarding schools, upper class 'public schools' in England, such as in the memoirs of C S Lewis, who offered a nuanced argument for placing it below cruelty as an evil of English public school life (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy,* Chapter 7 passim). More recently there have been allegatijons of sexual abuse of younger by older students at expensive private schools in Canada. (CBC News, "More charges in Winnipeg school abuse case") However, any implied 'normalcy' of such abuses of power, whether by teacher or fellow pupil, in such confined situations of all male schooling is abhorrent.

It took the outrage of non-Native public opinion at the abuse of non-Native orphan children at Mount Cashel to create the climate of opinion that finally empowered Native Canadians to talk of their own experiences. In all cases the sense of abandonment felt by the child victims must have been overwhelming and have been shared by those who never themselves experience physical cruelty or the ultimate violation of rape.

As serious as abuse was, in a sense it was less damaging than the third form of mistreatment that occurred. What might without distortion or exaggeration be termed emotional abuse probably did the most harm because it was the most pervasive and enduring damage done to students. Even former students who have defended residential schools, in whole or in part, agree that the worst aspect of residential school life was the loneliness. Many former students have recollections of emotional deprivation that was endemic to life in a residential school. Frequent student

recollections that they were ' only a number', that they were ' living by bells', and that they never received any sign of affection and positive enforcement all testify to the emotional coldness that resulted in part from the institutional setting and in part from racist attitudes and deficiencies in the staff and government supervision.

k. Neglect

Yet we are only now grasping the scale of the largest trauma of all – the awful silence toward the families of the children who never returned from the residential school.

The unquestioned form of harm that is now only being realized in its horror of anonymity was actually the number who died of illness, especially tuberculosis , and were buried in unmarked graves in school or mission grounds with no word sent to parents. What could be a more awful evidence of racism? According to the government's own investigation, an average of half of the children in these schools in the first decade of last century died while attending or within six months of leaving. (Kirkness, *First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles,* 10)

It seems scarcely credible today that the white population remained indifferent to the spread of the disease among the Indians, which frequently wiped out whole families. Indeed, one feels that the settlers were perhaps more fatalistic than indifferent. The epidemic among the European settlers had probably long since passed its peak, but a death rate due to tuberculosis of 200 per 100,000 was still common in 1890, and all had witnessed the disease in their own communities, where it caused the death of whole families. Familiarity had bred resignation: there was nothing the settlers could do for themselves, and so nothing they could do for their Indian neighbours. (Wherrett*, The Miracle of the Empty Beds*, 99)

Reading the records of behaviours by supervising authorities, both immediate in the institutions themselves and arms-length in Ottawa departments, one experiences a horrifying sense of the

Kafkaesque. There appears to be a truly nightmarish distortion of reality by powerful but anonymous administrators and bureaucrats. There is an awful sense of drift, of a sense that energetic change of direction is not possible, that thus things always have been and will remain, a situation where the power of control is so distorted in its expression, even though it evidently makes no sense and bears so little relation to its declared aims. One feels in the grip of a nightmare in which one is powerless in face of those who do not see the nightmare.

No one has made more horrifying allegations of cruelty and cover-up than the former United Church minister Kevin Annett and he does not hesitate in his inclusion of the terms 'holocaust' and 'genocide' in his study of residential schools, particularly on the west coast. He accuses the church-run residential schools of hiding the burial of many children in unmarked graves in the grounds of the schools and leaving their families to wonder at the silence.(Annett *Hidden from History: The Canadian Holocaust,* 54-62) His estimate of several lthousand such cases remains uncorroborated but the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation appointed by the federal government in 2009 has stated that inquiry into such allegations is part of its mandate.

l. Not entirely unanimous

It is now the credibility of those who would speak in defence or support of at least part of the experience of residential schools that is being tested. A few non-Native defenders of the last years of the schools still speak.

… the churches have failed to honour the dedicated service of most residential school employees, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal. They have failed to defend their own integrity and they have failed to defend the integrity of their innocent employees …. most people who worked in residential schools wanted to help children receive the type of education necessary to survive in the modern world …. Most residential school employees worked for very little pay, less recognition, many sleepless nights. (Clifton, " Residential Schools Story More Complicated")

Robert J. Carney noted that much of the current writing of those who attended residential school in different parts of Western Canada in 1940s and 1950s was highly critical, while memoirs of those attending at beginning of century tend to be praise-giving.

However, one need not conclude that residential schools became less responsive to student needs as the decades passed. Rather, it would appear that for many the meaning of the residential school experience has become more a matter of present-day insights than of understanding past events. Under such circumstances there is a danger that past residential school experiences and outcomes will be misinterpreted or exaggerated by those seeking to identify the causes of current problems within the Native community. (Carney, " Grey Nuns and Children of Holy Angels, Fort Chipewyan"

Is this yet another stage of denial by mainstream Canada?

There is a less self-defensive tone in some Native writers. In 2011 Pauline Dempsey, first recipient of the Crowchild Award from the City of Calgary for improvement of Native/non-Native relations, felt moved to write of her experience in general and of one teacher in particular.

I was born Pauline Gladstone, No. 142, of the Blood Indian Reserve, No. 142 being my father's Treaty number .In 1934 I entered the boarding school on the Blood Reserve which was known as St. Paul's Anglican Indian Residential School. For eight years – to 1942- I lived at the residential school even though my home where my parents lived was only two miles away. I could see my home every day from any window in the school on the east side….There are many arguments today as to whether natives should have been shunted away to residential school ….(and) my friends and I have discussed this at great length and wondered " what we might have done" or ' where we would we be today?" had it not been for the boarding school. We had

food, shelter, and a bed to sleep on…. We got a good education that allowed many of us to compete in the white world. There are three distinct things I abhor and feel strongly about as far as residential school is concerned. These are 1) to be taken away from our parents who were denied the natural process of parenthood 2) to be punished for speaking our native God-given language 3) being stripped of our individuality. We were all expected to act alike…But I always go back to the influence of Miss Wells who gave tremendous values to the…girls. Her influence managed to seep through to the next generation and beyond. (Dempsey, "Residential School Life")

How is one to find the most balanced account of a human experience where descriptions and explanations differ? Perhaps respect for the Aboriginal approach to truth of respect for multiple individual narratives is the best one.

l. The right to forgive

I will end this chapter with a story that does not explain the residential school experience , but is meant to suggest the multiplicity of voices that attach to all great sufferings by any human group. Simon Wiesenthal, the great Jewish hunter of Nazi war criminals, told a story from his childhood experience in a concentration camp. One morning he was taken from his work detail. The guard ordered him to follow into a building where lay a German soldier, dying from wounds received on the Eastern Front. He was told that the soldier was haunted by the image of a Jewish boy, much like Wiesenthal himself, standing at an upper window of a burning house into which the soldier and his companions had driven Jewish families from an Eastern village. Wiesenthal was told that the soldier wanted forgiveness from Wiesenthal, as a Jewish child. Wiesenthal told of remaining silent, until led away by the guard. (Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower,* 20-47) He explained to later audiences that his silence was out of a belief that only those who had suffered could forgive. And so it is with the residential schools

There are no true parallels in history. Yet just perhaps one should be careful of placing the source of present challenges facing Native communities in northern Alberta, particularly those related to schooling, on the residential schools alone . The highest proportion of Indian pupils in residential school vs total Indian pupil population was 1939-49 – approx 50% then sharp drop to 22% by 1959. (Jampolsky, "Advancement in Indian Education") The presentations to the Commission on Truth and Reconciliation in 2011-2012 perhaps have most meaning by adding enormous moral urgency to revisiting such efforts at economic reconstruction as the aims of the Kelowna Accord of 2006. Is it possible that an overwhelming focus by Aboriginals and the medial on the residential school as the root cause of pathologies in Native communities today will fail both Native and non-Native societies by allowing them to escape a bracing engagement with the multifaceted and ongoing factors creating a sense of inadequacy and dependenceon the one side and prejudice, marginalization, and downright neglect on the other?

The last word should belong to the victims.

The reporter for the *Edmonton Journal* recorded there was a quiet atmosphere in the local Friendship Centre for Prime Minister Harper's apology in the House of Commons for the residential school system.

A Cree singer offered a song to remember those who have passed on, including her uncle, who lived on the street and finally told her, a month before he died, that he had been sexually abused by a priest at the school in Fort Chipewyan. Mary …. 51 went to Holy Angels school in Fort Chipewyan for nine years

and came out unable to trust anyone, she said. (Edmonton Journal, *"* Harper apology ' a beginning'")

How can you re-build without trust?

8.

Northern residential schools: Native testimonies

a. Roll call of schools

The Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in northern Alberta were: Holy Angels in Fort Chipewyan, St. Henri in Fort Vermilion, St. Martin in Wabasca, St Bernard in Grouard, St. Augustine in Peace River ,St Xavier in Sturgeon Lake with Notre Dame de l' Assumption as the last established in 1951. St Augustine and St Henri were Anglican institutions. Otherwise all were administered by the OMI, with teaching carried out by nuns from Order of Sisters of Providence, except Fort Chipeywan where Sisters of Charity or Grey Nuns served as teachers. For one hundred years, if one takes the founding and disestablishment of Holy Angels Residential School in Fort Chipewyan from 1874 to 1974 as marking the beginning and end of all residential schooling in northern Alberta, aboriginal voices were discounted in the schooling of their children. Now these silent mouthings are being heard and non-Native Albertans must accustom themselves to hearing these testimonials to injustices carried out in our name, because the residual anger and grievance from the residential schools in our provincial north suffuses all present negotiation of school-community relations in our remote Native communities.

b. Metis enrolment

The inclusion of Metis children in mission residential schools was an uncertain affair. (Chartrand, *Metis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada,* 70-73). There were frequent requests by religious orders for Metis children to be admitted along with treaty children. Differing arrangements were made: refusal, permission if one Metis parent had settlement money to draw on, fee payment by parents, parental work or goods (wood/provisions) in lieu, entry dependant on whether #s of treaty children met enrolment needs – thus Metis children were

sometimes shifted around like a kind of human ballast. Duncan Campbell Scott, superintendent of Indian Affairs for most of first three decades of 20th century worked out the most articulated system for determining permissible entry (and therefore eligibility for per capita grant) based mostly on whether living the Indian or 'settled' mode of life. The closer the government thought the Metis were to First Nation communities, in a geographical or societal sense, the lower class of person they were thought to be. This lower class had priority over other Metis when being considered for admission to residential schools to ensure that the 'outcasts' and 'menaces' of society, living like Indians, were civilize*d.* Authors emphasize variability of application of these and other, (eg. physical appearance of lightness or darkness of skin, hair, eyes) criteria. It is important to emphasize the ambiguity that existed in admissions policies and how easy it was for Metis students to slip through the cracks of school administration*.* General observations on the experiences of Metis students:

1. *Generally speaking, all students at these schools shared the same daily activities, church ceremonies, rules, disciplines, and living conditions. However, to stay consistent with any set of recorded accounts regarding residential school experiences, it is fair to say that there is no one story from this experience that is universal …. Some residential school Survivors have completely negative memories of their school years, while others possess some positive memories and believe they benefited from their experiences.*
2. *The most common remark from Metis residential school Survivors is that they were outsiders. When asked to reflect on, not only their experiences in general, but on being Metis in an " Indian School", the most consistent response is that they were considered outsiders.*
3. *To many Metis, the fact that the Roman Catholic religion was the denomination taught at their school was a comfort. This was something familiar in a new school community that was regimented and unfamiliar.* (Chartrand, *Metis History and Experience and Residential Schools in Canada,* 77-78)

Metis children tended to be placed in residential school upon application of their father, following the death of wife and mother. Sometimes wages or government benefits were garnisheed to cover costs, if the grant was not forthcoming.

c. The trauma of separation

For all Aboriginal children caught up in the residential school system, the harm always started with being taken away.

Just being taken away from your home, that is the first travesty. Everything builds from there, Regardless of whether anything bad or constructive or good happened at a residential school, there is still that first sin, I'll call it, of taking kids away from parents. What we explore through the residential school process is : How has that experience, being taken away from their family – how has the abuse that people have suffered at residential schools – affected their lives? We go through this list: How are you relating to other people? How has this affected your ability to tell your spouse you love him? How has this affected your ability to hold your children? How has this affected your ability to tell your children you love them? How do you cope with nightmares? What do you do when someone reminds you of a priest, or a nun, or an employee? Usually what we end up talking about is people who feel anger, rage. Often I hear, ' I wish that so-and-so was here; I'd kill him.' That's real. (Robinson, "Indian Residential Schools' Independent Assessment Process")

. We grew up in a loving family on the trapline. On January, 1947, after our mother died of TB, we were taken by the RCMP to the residential school in Fort Providence. It was a BIG building. We were taken into a room into which came a BIG nun in a black habit. My little sister was frightened and screamed. I asked ' Why are we here?' She said ' You are here because you have no other place to go.' She took us out into the corridor, filled with grey sheets hanging to dry, upstairs to the dormitory filled with other girls – 120 it turned out later. All dressed the same, short haircuts, nobody smiling, we were separated from each other. Then came clap with a wooden clapper. The clap and the bell I heard for ten years., When it went you better move it. She gave us each a set of clothes and told me ' You are number 6'. That was the only name I had for ten years. (Crerar, interview, 2011)

Most testimonies are very critical, some quite shockingly so. These depositions are arranged first by category of harm and then by specific residential school of our north.

d. Harsh punishment

I recall getting beaten with a thing they called the clapper …. They had these things that were made out of wood with a hinge in the middle and they snapped them together to summon the kids when they needed them for something. They drew it like a gun when they needed and WHAM! You got it across the knuckles or across the head or across the back anywhere at all …. My cousin ran away one time … he (the priest) took him down to the basement and stripped off his clothes off and they tied him to a post … bare naked. They took all of us kids to watch and he used a belt, a strap, and he beat that kid until the kid was unconscious. Then he turned around and looked at all of us and he said, " Anybody have any ideas about running away?" You're asking me if I have something nice to say about that place! (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residental Schools,* 65-66)

… sometimes they wouldn't let the little guys go the washrooms. What happened? They'd piss in bed because they're scared to go. When you piss in your bed, honest, you know, they get that blanket and wash it. After its cold they put that over your head to dry it and sit…. If your nose got snotty or runny you were in trouble. After church they'd put a clothes pin on your nose … you'd wear that until you go to bed …. That hurt because those clothes pins, there used to be a hard spring on them. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools*, 48-49)

At a 2007 Holy Angels residential school reunion in Fort Chipewyan one former student recounted how, at the age of six, her face was seared on a red-hot stove by a supervising sister.

We went around this big post and we happened to grab each other …. Sister came and said, " if you want to kiss something … she took me by the hair and burned us on the stove. (CBC Canada North, " Alberta residential school reunion brings together memories, pain")

e. Sexual abuse

We had to sleep with our hands folded on the pillow not under the blankets. She (the sister nun) would walk by and she would reach under the blankets and start feeling me up. If I moved or anything she would say she was checking to see if I had wet the bed. It took me a long time to be able to talk about this … One day the Sister told me you have to go help the Brother downstairs.

He took me down in the basement, into the boiler rooms where he sat down in a chair and undid his bib overalls, pulled them down, and he exposed himself and forced me to fondle him. He told me if I ever said anything … (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools*, 67)

f. Forbidding of Native language and condemnation of Native culture

They beat us if we tried to talk our language. They thought, " That dirty language with dirty people you don't have to talk that language, talk English or French." So I lost my language. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 116)

" Don't you ever talk about these savages around here," he'd (the priest) say … that's my mum and dad. I told him I didn't have a father and he said " that savage" he used to call him that. That stayed with me in my mind – this savage thing – even after I got out of the mission.' (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 8)

g. Poor food

Where to start? The jack fish, there was this big pan this high, square maybe 3 feet square. The fish were not all gutted … the nun just cut it, we had beans on Friday it was basically the same. In the morning bacon grease, no lard, no nothing, just bacon grease and that was it in the morning. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 107)

They made me a bunch of cattle tails… You boil them and put potatoes and carrots in there, and a little bit of this and that …. Oh, my goodness, when they start to put it in the bowls – cattle tails. Boy, the food was terrible, terrible, and terrible. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 47)

At times we went hungry, it was always the same food mush in the morning no sugar…. You could eat all the bread you want but you got only one teaspoon of lard …. But the food was always the same. Mush in the morning, stew for dinner or beans for supper in fact they used to call us " mission beans" because we grew up on beans. (Poitras, Metis Memories of Residential Schools, 61)

h. Emotional coldness and loneliness

…it was an awful experience. You're lost – you're quite isolated and there's no kindness there – even the kids themselves were fighting, (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 11)

The thing I remember most about my experience is how lonely it was. When our mother passed away, they came and took us away, I remember the cops telling my father that if we didn't go to the convent that he would be thrown in jail. I was in there for 12 years …. Our house was just across the river, In the evenings I could see my dad light the lamp on the kitchen table across the river. I never went home, even in the summer. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 112)

For some the challenge of the past was too much. For others it has evoked a response full of determination that control over the schooling of Native children must be taken back by First Nations.

i. St. Xavier, Sturgeon Lake 1890-1961

In 1997 a project began on the Sturgeon Lake reserve, just west of Valleyview, to imagine and work toward a community based vision of the kind of healthy community desired by the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation. The core of this vision was rooted in the stories of the people in this community related to their contact with systems such as the Residential Schools and Child Welfare historically and in the present. A record of this process was published, containing testimonies by some of the former students at St. Francis Xavier IRS, as well as experiences related to the post –IRS so called '60s scoop' in which children continued to be lost to the community due to family breakdown related to the IRS experience. That experience produced (with individual exceptions) generalized feelings of inferiority, incompetence, and dependence in the children, along with years of adult experience with no parental responsibilities or accustomedness to the strains of raising children.

One testimony stands for many, most evidently indictable for cruelty and failure to fulfill the educational trust.

They should have taught us properly, and explained to us, and be kind to us, and then we would have succeeded in our education .... They were there to change us, not to teach us .... The things that hurt me most were the things they stripped us of that – our identity. You started hating yourself – they stripped you of your one set of clothes. If you had long hair, they cut it off. They start stripping you right from day one, as soon as you go through the door. And then they strip your language, they strip your beliefs .... That was something else that they stripped us of is love – from our family – and there was none in there. There was no affection there whatsoever .... Nothing was ever explained. The only thing that was if you talked your language, you were going to get punished – you'd end up standing in the middle for hours. That was the only thing explained to you .... They could have been nice, but they weren't .... I remember seeing one girl being beaten. She was against the wall, and the nun was just beating her .... She had her head turned against the wall, and she was kicking her, kneeing her in the back – just beating her. The girl was yelling " Don't!" Finally somebody must have run down to tell her sister, and her sister ran up and yelled for the nun to stop, that she was reporting her. And then she (the nun) finally let her go. (Lafrance, *The Sturgeon Lake Experience,* 112-119)

As noted above, there are some exceptions. One highly respected elder in the Sturgeon Lake Cree Band described how she was taken in as an orphan, spending most of her life in the residential school for about ten years in the 30s and 40s in an atmosphere that was strict, but not cruel, and included some signs of relaxed relations in those periods when she and other orphans remained at the residential school during holidays. What she does in retrospect most resent were the proscriptions against the pupils speaking Cree. (Mary Kappo, interview, 2011)

j. St. Bernard IRS, Grouard 1894-1961

St. Bernard Mission at Grouard was founded by the OMI in 1872. In 1894 the Sisters of Providence joined the mission to take care of 30 orphans and set up a boarding school (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trail Blazers*, 26-58). The food at the mission was generally fish from Lesser Slave Lake and potatoes on land cleared for the mission. The sheer physical labour

required on the part of all, children, nuns, priests and brothers, to maintain provisions was impressive and sometimes thwarted by nature so that in early years some boarders were sent home while only the orphans remained. When the mission laundry burned down in 1933, for three years the Sisters travelled across the Lesser Slave Lake to St. Bruno Mission in Joussard every two weeks, bringing with them the washing for about 170 people. Not until 1939 did the federal government pay for the digging of a well to replace the system of drawing water from the river. With regard to the key work of teaching, the Order's own history claims a commitment to improving both pupils' pride in their Indian heritage and to teacher training among their own members.

It would seem that Grouard reached its zenith in the 1940s …. Because bad publicity in the movies and story books made children ashamed of their Indian background, the teachers decided to counteract this negative attitude. Their year's enterprise (the 'enterprise' was the key pedagogical vehicle in the first progressive education curriculum in Canada, introduced in Alberta in 1937) *entltled " Our Indian Heritage" aimed to show the children the richness of their native culture …. So well did everyone cooperate in giving the students a well-rounded education that (School) Inspector C. Stehelin of McLennan, Alberta, wrote that the Grouard School was the nicest, best equipped and best-managed school in his inspectorate.*
(LaBissoniere, *Providence Trail Blazers,* 40-41)

Yet one is left wondering whether such praise was affected by limited assumptions about what life expectations were appropriate for Native children. Assumptions that were so endemic in non-Native society as hardly to be conscious of the discrimination involved, as in this commendatory letter from Fred McNally, Deputy Minister of Education for Alberta, following a visit in 1942.

The mission provides a first-rate opportunity for an all-round education. In addition to the regular school subjects, the girls get training in the domestic arts under conditions which approach nearly to those to be found in the homes which we hope they are going to have. A similar training on the farm for the boys will make the opportunity complete. (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trail Blazers,* 42)

In the late 1950s the Department of Indian Affairs built a new school and residence at the mission, but already it seemed out of step with the evolution of policy. Increasingly Catholic day schools on regional reserves, and even such distant ‘feeders’ as Whitehorse, were keeping children in their own communities . In December, 1961, the boarding school closed on one month’s notice.

A special memorial is provided by Larry Loyie in his recreation of how his idyllic childhood on the reserve near Lesser Slave Lake was ended by Indian Affairs authorities. In 1944 the author was 10 years old living near Lesser Slave Lake. The story is set in the last summer he spent with his Cree family on the land before being forced to attend residential school: *Mama’s eyes were shiny with tears. “ They told us there is nothing we can do. All the children have to go to their school or the parents will be put in prison.”* (Loyie*, As Long as the Rivers Flow*, chapt.4) In the sequel describing his experiences at the residential school, Loyie re-created the message to all incoming children: *Sister Denise sat at her desk and told them what she expected of them in the days to come. “ Your parents didn’t want you good-for-nothings. That’s why you’re here. You are here to learn about our Lord Jesus Christ, how to pray, and how to behave in church. You will learn the Mass answers in Latin and how to serve Mass. You will sing and pray in Latin and English, and you will learn to say the rosary. You will learn all of these or by the grace of God you will be punished, so help me.”*(Loyie *Goodbye Buffalo Bay,* 12)

An interview with a former student who attended in 1950s, demonstrated both anger at the treatment of RIS children and resentment at perceived indulgence of Others who came later asking for recognition of ‘their’ identity

‘ After my mother died, my sister, about 15 looked after me and my 3 brothers. The RCMP with one of the teachers hauled us 4 boys off to Grouard, for our own good I guess. Some kids may have been put in there by their parents for education purposes …. The teachers were quite good at least the ones I had. It was the nuns that looked after us that were the problem. When I think back now, they had a terrible job, they had 75 kids from 16 to 5 or 6 living together in one building and there was 2 of them that worked shifts. So you can see how mean spirited they could become. Of course, when you’re a kid you don’t think of that. 99 percent of the kids were natives, the few whites weren’t treated much better, they were the “ savage with white hair”, savage pronounced in French. Most of the kids had a very very fragile psychs, if that’s the right word.

They needed nurturing, confidence building, all the good stuff. What they got was constant berating. Sometimes if there was a behavior problem and the nun was maybe in a bad mood, she would call all the 75 boys inside and scream out " Grab the Beads. The Devil is in the Hall". We would kneel by our benches and pray for hours on the concrete floor.

Too bad the whole mess couldn't have been avoided. I guess there is a fine line between trying to help someone and molding them to a certain self-serving image. They stripped them of their customs, language and mostly pride. Too bad they couldn't do that to the Arabs that are coming into our Country and demanding rights that are completely foreign to us and they are basically taking over the country. (Quoted, Armstrong, correspondence, 2008)

k. St Augustine, Peace River 1898-1951

Sisters of Providence joined Oblate Fathers at Peace River in 1898 to establish a boarding school at St. Augustine Mission. Originally with 21 boarders at the cost of the mission itself, Treaty #8 brought a per capita grant for Treaty Indians and by 1901 there were 51 boarders. By the inter-war period the proportion of aboriginal (Treaty and Metis) to incoming European homesteaders was dropping and by 1939 the Child Welfare Department of Alberta began placing orphans and neglected children in the residence. In December, 1951, the Sisters received sudden news that St Augustine's was to close immediately and most student residents were to be transferred to a new residential school just opened in Assumption much further north, except for ten students moved to St. Jean-Baptiste Dormitory in McLennan.

Some students maintained memories of gratitude.

Former students of St. Augustine's have kept an esprit de corps that is remarkable. One of them, Mr. James St.-Germain, organized a day of commemoration of the early missionaries on July 30-31, 1977. It included unveiling and dedication of a plaque honoring the Sisters of Providence and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. (Provincial Archives of Alberta, *Missions of the Holy Angels Province in Alberta,* 19-20)

More common, however, were the views expressed by an elderly Aboriginal resident of Peace River thirty years after that commemorative event-

…after the closure in 1950, the site of St. Augustine's became the location of the Peace River Correctional Institute in 1964. A former resident of the Mission School commented, " Not much has changed … it was a jail then and a jail now". (Quoted, Rennie, " A Questionable Mission")

Life in the residential school was not warm, literally or metaphorically at St. Augustine. One former student recalled that between every second bed in the large boys dormitory hall there was a wash stand with pitcher and basin, " often you would have to crack the ice on top to wash your face in winter." Sheehan also commented that although no sexual or physical abuse took place that he knew of during this residence, " *they didn't go out of their way to make it enjoyable at all either."*He referred to the clappers as castinets. John Testawits, grandson of Duncan Testawits, who signed Treaty #8, attended in 1920s. When asked the worst thing about the mission, replied *" the food and the punishment…if you don't listen or follow directions…strap"*. (Quoted, Rennie, "A Questionable Mission")

l. Our Lady of Assumption, Assumption 1951-1971

Whereas at all other mission sites in northern Alberta the Sisters of Providence must first construct their own boarding schools, it was different at Assumption, about 700 miles north of Edmonton. The circumstances illustrate some of the competing forces affecting mission residential schools in the post-war period. On the one hand the OMI continued to press for further missions and evangelization among the Native people of northern Alberta, especially through schooling. After repeated requests to the Department of Indian Affairs regarding the Slavey Indians in the extreme corner of northwest Alberta, a new residential school was built on condition that the church staff it. Here Bishop Routhier encountered the competing trend to church mission expansion, the decline in enrolment in the Order of the Sisters of Providence. The Mother House refused his request for additional Sisters, and this was what led him to abruptly close the residential school at St. Augustine Mission in Peace River, transferring the staff immediately to Assumption.

The school's location was very isolated, deep in Alberta's northern woods. The nearest village was eight miles away through forest and very bad roads, Mail came only once a month until

1959 and only in 1963 was a mobile telephone unit available. In the first year there were 75 boarders, by 1965 there were 147.

The children were lovable and very shy. Attendance at school, and living away from home, were foreign to them, and at first many of them would fail to return after the weekend at home. They had a striking artistic bent, and over the years produced handicrafts, paintings and other works which frequently won prizes in exhibitions in Edmonton and Calgary. Verbal expression was not so much a part of their culture, but came more easily as they had such experiences as putting on concerts, receiving groups from elsewhere for hockey games, etc., and going on field trips to other places in Canada. (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trail Blazers*, 121-132)

By 1970 the number of boarders had dropped to 65, as economic development, especially energy and forestry related, began to bring an increase of population in the region and with it an increase in day schools. The band council wanted the Sisters to remain as hostel supervisors, but without any role in religious education. They declined and the mission was closed.

m. Henry Mission, Fort Vermilion, 1900-1973

Perhaps it was the provisions in Treaty #8 for federal per capita pupil grants that Bishop Emile Grouard had in mind when, in a letter requesting Sisters of Providence to staff a residential school at Fort Vermilion, he used the phrase, " The hour of Providence has struck". (29. *Providence Trail Blazers* pp 71-82) An earlier version of the isolated situation of Assumption IRS after World War II, there was no telegraph until 1930, mail came every three months until 1938, and a well was only provided in 1939. Privation of physical shelter seemed to be the rule, aggravated by fires in 1914, 1925, and 1932. By 1953 there were 100 boarders, but the shift of students to Catholic day-school had begun. By 1965 the number of boarders was restricted to fifty and all instruction took place in the day-school. When the Department of Indian Affairs in 1964 put a limit of 50 on the number of boarders that might be accommodated at St. Henry school at Fort Vermilion, any remaining students who could not attend school as day pupils were transferred to St. Martin Mission in Wabasca. The residence closed in 1968.

n. St. Martin's, Desmarais 1901-1973 and St. Charles, Wabasca 1939-1967

The school opened in 1901 with 20 pupils. Life at Wabasca was demanding for everyone. Repeatedly the chronicles tell of famine among the Indians, of the mission's horses and cows dying of weakness in winter for lack of food, of the reliance placed on the potato crop and other vegetables grown on the mission farm. Frequently epidemics swept through the region and community. Nonetheless, by 1931 there were about 120 boarders. The residence at Point St. Charles served a day school from 1939-1967. By that time Wabasca-Desmarais had become a single municipal unit and a public high-school had been opened. (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trailblazers,* 85-97)

o. St. Bruno Mission, Joussard 1913 – 1969

This IRS was established by Bishop Grouard when it was evident that Indians from across Lesser Slave Lake were unwilling for their children to send their children to St. Bernard. Attendance at first was sporadic, with parents often not bringing their children back after Easter. There is no mention of compulsion being used to require their return, only that the children 'eventually ' arrived. During the 1918 flu epidemic the Indian Agent asked that students not return home at Christmas so as to limit contagion. No children died. In the late 1930s the decision by the Department of Indian Affairs that children had permission to go home every weekend and holiday was welcome to all. Constant pressure was put on the Department for funds to expand and improve the facilities. In 1961 grade 12 studies were presented for the first time to four students who had reached that level. They included Harold Cardinal, who went on to become a prominent Indian spokesperson. That still leaves as somewhat problematic the assessment by High Prairie School District *"I am generally pleased with the work observed in the Joussard Indian School during my visits. The instruction was sound and thorough both in lesson presentation and in giving individual assistance. The pupils are alert, confident, and are achieving at a higher level than I expected to find.* (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trail Blazers,* 116) Teaching grade 12 at Joussard ended in 1964, when the Department decided that attending school in High Prairie offered more choice and increased integration. Five years later all instruction at the Joussard IRS ended. (LaBissoniere, *Providence Trailblazers,* 111-119)

p. Holy Angels Fort Chipewyan 1874 -1974

Schooling In the oldest of northern Alberta's Indian Residential Schools began ('founding' seems too large a word) in 1874 with 15 pupils.(33. Clarke, Maureen) Spiritual and religious instruction dominated until 1950s. Languages of instruction included Chipewyan, Cree, French, and English for many years, but over time Native languages became discouraged then repressed. 1945 new Holy Angels school, for 80 students, some stayed all year. Author suggests that this was beginning of severing of family relationships and parental responsibility for child raising and teaching. Also in 1940s fed govt began to provide subsidy for Metis childen, at same time as hard times were making it convenient for parents to hand over financial responsibility to mission. On the other hand school attendance was compulsory only in organized school districts which Ft Chip was not and pupils often left at 12-14 years when old enough to help out at home/trap line. In late 40s Anglicans created a school district for their day school and taxes went to them. Community split between RC and Protestant. In the 1950s Holy Angels was transferred to Indian Affairs, secularized and renamed Bishop Piche school. In 1961 Northland School Division formed. By 1971 there were 40 children at the public school and 360 registered Indian, Metis, and a few white attended Bishop Piche. 1974 the residence (100yrs) was closed. In 1970s there were moves toward collaboration/consolidation. 1-3 at public, 4-12 at Bishop Piche. 1n 1976 occurred the first grade 12 graduation. In 1981 Bishop Piche school burned down in suspicious circumstances. A new integrated school began operations in 1986 with 250 pupils.

One wishes that the original admonition of Father Duchaussois had always been heeded throughout the long ,more than a century, history of Holy Angels.

The history of this foundation brings home to us the terrible isolation of those poor northern Missions where the only savoire faire, the only guiding rule of life, has to be, " Do the best you can" or, as Mgr. Grandin preferred to express it, " Do the least badly that you can.
(Duchaussois, *The Grey Nuns in the Far North (1867-1917),* 146)

There are a few testimonies in which former students speak positively or at least in neutral tones about their experience: *Different times we got a licking for doing things you weren't supposed to*

but it didn't seem too bad at the time …. There were some good days, some bad … It was a pretty good school in my time. (Poitras *Metis Memories of Residential Schools*, 86-87)

I guess I'd thank them (the church) for everything they did for me when I was in the mission …. I don't know, how lots of other people I've heard being bothered by what they say happened. I can't find anything about that that's supposed to bother me. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 99)

Robert J. Carney has carried out a study of the first 50 years of Holy Angels Residential School, covering the period from 1874-1923. He believed alongside the emphasis on Christianization that the thrust of the teaching was in the image of what he termed ' the Native wilderness equation'.

The school also provided a general, non-religious education which emphasized basic literacy and numeracy skills. Such instruction was provided on the assumption that most Indian and Metis children would take up a life of hunting, trapping and fishing; and that the 3 Rs, while not essential to such a mode of living, would nonetheless give them certain advantages …. Despite their differences, both missionary and trader saw the wilderness –where traditional beliefs had been tempered by the promise of the gospel and the vagaries of the hunt had been lessened by the benefits of trade- as the best, if not the only, environment for the area's aboriginal population. Catholic missionaries were particularly given to fostering the wilderness archetype, the Christian trapper, who was free to follow his traditional ways, subject, of course, to certain, but what were thought to be not incompatible, trade and religious expectations …. what has been termed the Native wilderness equation…. (Carney " The Grey Nuns and the Children of Holy Angels, Fort Chipewyan, 1874-1923")

The basic Dept of Indian Affairs assumption behind the curriculum of residential schools – primarily as agricultural training institutions for the reserve system were especially for Aboriginal children living in non-reserve, non-agricultural areas of northern Alberta. Little information exists about any former pupils in this first 50 years doing anything else, with a handful of exceptions who became part of HBC, Grey Nuns, even two who became Oblate priests. Accounts by former pupils indicate that many of the sisters were viewed as models, and that their presence was particularly appreciated because they were *" always very happy"* and

because they were willing *" to do without many things ... and to suffer many hardships".* (Carney " The Grey Nuns and the Children of Holy Angels, Fort Chipewyan, 1874-1923")

The early days were indeed those of privation for teachers and pupils alike, as in the shed that served as the first school.

The so-called " temporary " house served the nuns for seven years. The only chairs it ever knew were planks set up on trestles. As for sleeping accommodation, one of the Nuns had the only bed (such as it was), another slept on the table, and the little girls, rolled in their blankets, slept on the floor near their teacher.

... understand what a privation it is for dwellers amid the Northern snows to be able only at rare intervals to receive or to send a letter. By the Grey Nuns this privation is known as 'fasting from letters'. To such fasting one can never get accustomed. (Carney ' The Grey Nuns and the Children of Holy Angels")

Similar accounts of sacrifice and service since 1924 are cited in a collection of biographies of Grey Nuns who staffed schools and hospitals in the Northwest Territories and northeast Alberta until the 1990s. Published in the midst of growing perception and condemnation since 1990 of widespread abuses in the residential schools, it asserts the validity of contrary accounts of motivation and behavior by the religieuses.

Many men and women, including elders, express strong feelings of sadness and even anger at the controversial media comments they hear from their counterparts from time to time. Most are greatly offended that the cycle of accusations, by those who have suffered and have sad memories of some missionaries, who possibly lost control of themselves at times, have unjustly tarnished the reputation of the majority of the sisters whose performance was exemplary .... Many former students and elders ... have asked me several times to get their message to the public so that they will also hear the positive story of the "mission schools". (Sutherland , *Northerners Say, Thanks Sisters",* Introduction)

Accounts by some of the contributors, particularly those of Metis Catholic background, who were former students at Holy Angels School stress that the many rules and pietistic practices were a challenge, without being completely alien to their family background.

The rules and discipline were more strict than at home. We had to keep silence at times. But in hindsight, I realize that our religious up-bringing, our daily prayers, frequent reception of the sacraments, and all the training we got at home prepared us well to live with the sisters. (Quoted, Sutherland, *"Northerners Say, Thanks Sisters",* 60)

Other perspectives on language rules are raised.

There were many languages spoken at the school but sometimes that was a cause for division and fights among the children …. The sisters had good reasons to ask the children to speak English so they could protect those who were afraid or could be abused by the older ones. (Quoted, Sutherland, *Northerners Say, Thanks Sisters,* 63)

q. Cautions

Do the differences in these accounts suggest that the 'truth' lies half-way in-between? Not so. There need be no denial of individual positive reports while noting the overwhelming number of agonized recollections. Any reconciliation between such witnesses must await a forgiveness within the Native community that is beyond the power of non-Natives and must indeed be part of a greater forgiveness to them from the Native community.

The anger is predominant and it continues and has consequences for today's schoolchildren. It is striking to note the frequency with which the often-strained, even agonized, recollections of those who have been interviewed about their experience in residential schools in our region end their accounts with a discordant mix of guilt about their own children and troubled perception of disrespectful Aboriginal youth behavior in today's schools.

I didn't know how to raise kids. The way I thought was best, I raised my kids the convent way. I beat them and I hit them like I was hit. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 40 *)*

I believe my children suffered because of my parenting style. I was rigid you know, and didn?t know how to show the kids love because I never knew love myself. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 53)

I’m just hoping that it ends, because you see we were never parents, we never had parents of our own. How are we supposed to know how to be a parent when you don’t have any guidance from anybody? All I had in me all my life was anger. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 67)

When I entered school I sure learned the difference of being without my parents and I thought that the way to bring up my children was to be strict. I was swatted and that was my way of parenting ?. Now that I have grandchildren, I tell my children to go easy on them, don’t be like me. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 61)

Some of the problems we have especially from the people in my generation. Their children aren’t disciplined very well. I think that stems from the fact that we were living on their (church’s) harsh rules and when they had their own children. They didn’t want to discipline them as much as we were disciplined. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 123)

Sometimes I wonder what is going to happen to the new generation. Everything is, you know, money, money. Children don’t work no more. They don’t learn like us. Why are they swearing, why are they lying? (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 94)

Here at this school you have a whole bunch of teachers who can’t control the kids. Discipline (is lacking). Parents don’t talk to their kids. They take their children’s side when teachers try to tell them something. I see them, parents at the school, where kids talk back to the teachers. (Poitras, *Metis Memories of Residential Schools,* 100)

Let the outcome of all the harm that was done to generations past not be to fail to require generations present to learn how to rise to challenge today, including the demands required for schooling success.

9.

Northern residential schools: post-IRS strategies

a. Overview

Awareness that a crisis existed in northern Alberta schooling for Native students began first with the situation of the Metis in the 1930s. In the 20th century Metis history, including schooling, in Alberta has been a phenomenon of the north. 80% of Metis locals are in northern Alberta and all the Metis settlement schools under the Metis Betterment Act of 1938 are in the north. The new directions for Treaty Indians of the provincial north began with the Department of Indian Affairs policy of winding down residential schools in favour of integration with provincial public school districts in the 1960s. At the same time it was recognized that a totally different kind of school district- Northland School District as it was to become - was required to meet the challenges of isolated Native settlements being inadequately served by schools at the limits of existing districts, supplemented by independent schools being run by new evangelical missions, and the overall demographic challenge of burgeoning school age population of First Nation and Metis that were overcrowding the dilapidate facilities of the remaining residential schools. The third schooling initiative for those belonging to Treaty#8 has been the development of band administered schools outside the provincial public school systems, including Northland School Division. The results of all these initiatives have been mixed.

b. Metis Settlement Schools

By the 1930s the situation of most Metis in northern Alberta had become desperate. In certain northern areas of Alberta, the Metis were living on the road allowances as this was the only land available for them at that time. Their educational opportunity was limited to the few public schools and the church residential schools in those areas where they spent some of their time. The Metis themselves often wandered about, and their children were seldom in one place long enough to complete a full term of school. (Knill , "Schools in the Wilderness)" The most reliable figure that has been given is that approximately 80% of the Metis population under twenty-one years of age in the Province of Alberta in 1935 were without any education. The teacher could not follow the Metis as they went through the bush in pursuit of their livelihood. The few that did attend school for very limited periods of time usually attended public schools in northern isolated areas.These schools only existed because of a demand by the white settlers.

The Metis Association of Alberta was formed to advocate for improvement in schooling for Metis children, especially in the north.The Ewing Half-Breed Commission of 1934 recommended farm colonies as the most effective and, ultimately, the cheapest method of dealing with the problem and day schools, with enrolment restricted to Metis children from the colony.

The evidence is, that in all these settlements where there are no white schools large numbers of children are growing up without any education. Certain church or denominational schools are doing splendid work on a purely voluntary basis?.It was stated that 80% of the half-breed children of the Province of Alberta receive no education whatever. Even those Metis children who live within an area served by a public school are averse to going to such a school because they are ridiculed and humiliated by the white children.

(Sessional Paper no. 72: Journals of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, *Report of the Alberta Enquiry Into and Concerning the Problems of Health, Education, Relief and General Welfare of the Half-Breed Population of the Province*, 95)

Based originally on the Metis Population Betterment Act 1938 the present Metis Settlements are: Buffalo Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Paddle Prairie, and Peavine, each with approximately one thousand inhabitants. Only children of settlement members could attend the colony school. In a 2011 interview the principal of Paddle Prairie Settlement School expressed a mixture of pride and concern over past student achievements, including professional designations, and evidence of present declining motivation due to welfare dependency. (Price, telephone interview, 2011) She also recalled the fist fights with non –Native students in the early 70s when junior-high students were bussed to an adjacent public school, causing the Settlement to add a junior high wing to its own school.

At the west end of Lesser Slave Lake lies High Prairie. About 100 km northeast of High Prairie lies Gift Lake, a small northern Metis Settlement. The schooling situation is serious. The development hopes associated with funding provided through the Metis Settlements Accord of 1989 have come and gone. Unemployment sits at 40-50% and student absenteeism is high, hindering both individual progress and whole class instruction. The outcome reflects the general pattern in Northland School Division schools, where only 20% of students complete high school within three years of entering Grade 10 compared to the provincial average of 70%. It is also the case that mann of the communities served by Northland do not have a high school program, forcing the students to leave home for secondary studies. At about 50 km north of High Prairie, in the Peavine Metis Settlement residents hope to have taken a step toward addressing this by opening the new Bishop Routhier School. The new school will provide junior high as well as elementary, with shops for home economics and industrial arts, along with a library that the old school never had. The students just loved the new stuff.

When I walked inside the new school tears came down my eyes because it is so beautiful. Shiny floors, beautiful classes. It has library and lockers, SMART boards.... It's so lovely to be in the new school. (O'Donnell, "Open for learning")

It is ironic then that it was Northland School Division's problems in dealing with delays over student entry to the school that precipitated the decision by Alberta Education Minister David Hancock to disband the corporate board of Northland School Division and appoint a three-member team to investigate the poor student performance in the Division, the largest geographically in Alberta, and serving a student population that is 95% First Nations or Metis.

c. Metis schooling outside the Settlements

Most Metis in northern Alberta continued to live and try to access schooling for their children outside the Metis Settlements. The prejudice continued, as evident in 1963 report on the situation of Metis students in public schools along the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake.

A number of Metis pupil characteristics were reported by teachers and school administrators as constituting a problem for schools. Foremost was poor attendance. Another was language difficulty, as an estimated 30% were reported to speak Cree at home all the time, another 20 per cent Cree and English. Lack of personal cleanliness was also frequently noted. Sore attributed to lack of cleanliness and improper diet, were mentioned. (Card ,*The Metis in Alberta Society,* 250)

One of the school sieves is the segregation apparent in the informal structure of the school. Children of the dominant white population tend to maintain their dominance in school situations through a variety of ways, through patterned aloofness, through differential dating practices which exclude white-Metis pairs from most school and community functions . Another sieve is the tradition of academic defeat for Metis, which is part of local high school and community cultures, a tradition accompanied by rumors of teacher discrimination toward persons of Indian ancestry. This tradition, expressed by Metis youth and their parents, appears to operate as a deterrent to Metis educational aspirations, especially in an academic high school. (Card, *The Metis in Alberta Society,* 253)

There were exceptions, as in the case of the early history of the Metis community of Kelly Lake, just on the border of BC and Alberta, which continued to live and work productively with a combination of trapping and lumbering. The school was founded by trader Jim Young in the 1920s and the pupils were much admired by their early teachers, such as Gerry Andrews, later Chief of Surveys for the province of BC.

*The school opened one month late that first year since most of the community spent September away on a berry-picking safari.p.24 First pupils: There were about a dozen, nine boys and three girls. Ages ranged from about six to 14. They were shy, but bright and responsive. They were good looking too ? most with rosy cheeks under warm-brown skin, black eyes, hair and beautiful teeth, They were clean and neatly dressed. All wore moosehide moccasins, I never had occasion to suspect lice. P.26 (Re children coming to school on very cold days)These children were naturally stoical and never complained or whimpered from discomfort or pain. Those crossing the lake ice sometimes got their feer wet from water pressured up from below the ices and spreading under the snow. Their cold little feet would clonk on the floor like blocks of ice. We would dry their socks and moccasins as best we could over the heater while they stood barefoot on an old rug. These experiences together engendered a warm esprit de corps among us. They were great kids! (*Andrews, *Metis Outpos*t, 117)

This excellence by students and teachers continued and perhaps culminated in an episode in 1950. A teaching couple with exceptional skill in music led the children to a sensational performance at the Dawson Creek Music Festival that year, in which the children were lauded for their diction and their deportment. Be it noted, nonetheless, that this was all praise for a striking emulation of music and performance ‘ in the white way’. The community was later hard hit by timber grants of companies that prevented and disrupted their traditional lifestyle, leading to inactivity and alcoholism.

A more representative Metis schooling experience was reflected in the observations made in 1948 of Calling Lake School. The school was on the fringe of Athabasca School District, 50 miles north of Athabasca itself, with a road over muskeg in winter but not summer. The reporter from the ATA magazine found a one-room school with 22 children, 7 of Scottish or Ukrainian descent, the rest Metis. Their parents were trappers, mink farmers , fishermen. The building and the equipment were in a dilapidated state and the school texts of Dick and Jane were unrelated to their life. (Goverman, "They're not learning") Almost forty years later another reporter from the same professional teacher magazine travelled out to visit Father R. Perin School at Janvier, 120 kms. south of Fort McMurray. The reporter found an attractive, modern school, with enthusiastic teachers and happy children. (de Luna,
" A train ride to Janvier's school') Almost exactly mid-way between the two visits had occurred the creation of Northland School Division in 1961.

d. Northland School Division

The pressure for the creation of Northland School Division #61 came from demographics. Up until WW11 the Treaty Indian population of northern Alberta had declined, stabilized in the early 40s and then doubled by 1951. This growth in population was going to crowd out the Metis who had been taken into the residential schools, a system that Indian Affairs now wished to wind down.

It is notable when the largest administrative effort in the last fifty years was made to address schooling deficiencies of Native children in the most remote areas of northern Alberta – the creation of Northland School Division in 1961 – that virtually no consideration was initially given to the collaborative design of a curriculum that took account of Native tradition or of the Native experience in the north since the signing of Treaty #8. Efforts since then, and they have been considerable, have had to be balanced against the strong expressed wish of the participating communities to have their children taught the same curriculum as children elsewhere in the

province. The key circumstance that led to the creation of Northland School Division was demographic. Since the 1950s the Department of Indian Affairs had been reducing funding to residential schools and mission schools in favour of integration with the provincial public school system. Such independent districts that operated isolated schools at the fringes of their districts were seeing their schools decay from district debt.At the same time the school-age population among First Nation and Metis in the north was growing so that the children would be turned away.

A model for northern school services for largely Aboriginal communities existed in Saskatchewan with centralized control by a Ministry of Education officer. This was the model followed in Alberta with the establish

ment , on December 30, 1960, of Northland School Division. It took a year or so to balance geographic logic with existing linkages for some schools with other school divisions.It was believed that Native communities close to and already served by existing non-Native school districts should continue in that relationship: for example, High Prairie, Peace River, and Fort Vermilion. A master-agreement was worked out with Indian Affairs for all Treaty children attending the Northland schools. The present 23 schools administered by the Division include those originally developed on the northern Metis Settlements.

It was an administrative strategy begun with high hopes, but building new schools has been easier than raising levels of student achievement. Student achievement results have consistently been lower than the rest of the province, particularly at the Grade 6 and Grade 9 levels. High school completion rates are low and the performance on provincial diploma exams of those who do reach Grade 12 is generally weak. The situation had become so serious by 2010 that in January of that year, the existing Board with representatives from all participating communities was dismissed and an Inquiry Team appointed to recommend organizational reform. The Team reported in November,2010, and has proposed a nine-year window of renewed effort in literacy, numeracy, and parent engagement. If no improvement occurs, it proposed that the Northland

School Division be broken up and its constituent schools become part of separate existing school districts. (Minister of Education, Province of Alberta, *Report of the Northland School Inquiry*)

e. 'Integration into provincial public schools

It was in the 1960s that the Department of Indian Affairs shifted focus, not indeed from the objective of Indian assimilation, but the means and strategy. It began to negotiate contracts for providing schooling for Treaty Indians within provincial public education systems. This was done on a piecemeal basis with individual public and separate school boards, the latter at least representing the familiarity of liturgy for some families. John Chalmers recalls the tension that was sometimes part of these discussions and that revealed the depth of prejudice likely to be faced by the children themselves.

...the integration of Indian children into white schools was not always welcomed White parents protested with arguments that were curiously reminiscent of those used by segregationists in Dixieland....

(even) the ultimate argument – how would you like your daughter to marry one of them.....Gradually, however, the arguments were stilled. (Chalmers *Schools of the Foothills Province*, 266)

Perhaps it was the gradualist approach – in one place arrangements for older but not younger children, in another a certain proportion of each grade level – perhaps the remnants of an older Canadian tradition of co-existence vs confrontation in the West, but it was made to work and the overwhelming proportion of Treaty Indians receive their education today in schools that are part of the provincial public school system.

There is a risk in leaping ahead too far, however. It draws a veil over decades – yes, decades - of curricular neglect and schoolyard bullying faced by these early ' integrationists'. Even by the 1970s there remained a dark side to the attitudes permitted if not encouraged in Alberta's textbooks. In September, 1981, members of the Faculty of Education at University of Alberta completed a contract with the Curriculum Branch of Alberta Education to study the adequacy of the Social Studies curriculum respecting Native people.

Generally in the curriculum, Indians are " those people." It would be absurd, of course, to assume that material addressed to a general population would address itself implicitly to any ethnically-distinguished group. The quality of descriptors that attend the mention of Indians is such, however, that in much of the curriculum material it would be inconceivable that an Indian student were contemplated as reader. The accounts are not those of the dispassionate and impersonal text-narrator, they are heavily value laden and have, very often, negative concomitants. (Decore, Carney, Urion, *Native People in the Curriculum,* 5)

It all seemed to lead to discriminatory treatment by non-Native staff and students.

It always seemed that the kids in the hall and office were Native. One day all grade 7-9 Native kids were being taken to the office to get hair cut because Native – called Indian – children were thought to have brought lice, but they did not check. My grandmother was furious because our hair was always clean and my uncle Glenn had long hair down his back and his hair was cut…We were not allowed to speak Cree anywhere – if caught, got a strap. I got strapped a lot and that was when I started learning English, so as not to get the strap. (Horseman, interview, 2011)

Cruelty among children could result from these deficiencies – often aggravated by confusion with the experience of the American West – as in the taunt of " wagon-burner" that was thrown

across the schoolyard at that same young student. Most of these errors have now been corrected, in the textbooks, if not the schoolyard, but a remaining indictment is the silence about the experience of Native people of northern Alberta in the hundred years since the signing of Treaty #8.

One phenomenon generally evident in all learning resources is the tendency to emphasize native heritages and activities primarily during the contact and interdependence phases of European-Amerindian interaction. .... From the time of the second Riel rebellion to the present, the resources do not discuss native realities in any significant or comprehensive way. (Decore, Carney, and Urion, *Native People in the Curriculum,* 25)

This general silence remains and is the key missing layer in the archaeology of the schooling of the great majority of non-Native residents of northern Alberta even today.

f. Band-run Schools

First Nation control of First Nations education through band schools on the reserves, funded by the federal government but without administrative support or supervision, can sometimes bring its own problems.

In South Africa, they called it apartheid. Separate but equal. It was always a lie of course. Separate is never equal, especially not when that separation is based on race and social class. That is as bitterly true on the First Nations reserves of Alberta as the Bantustans of the old South Africa. You'll find no better example of dysfunctional disparity than in the classrooms of reserve schools. In Canada, native bands have the right to run their own schools. That sounds like a

noble exercise in self-government, a respectful sensitivity for aboriginal culture. In reality, it's an administrative nightmare that leads to glaring social inequities. (Simons "*Broken Pencils?*")

Beginning in 1973 and accelerated by the revelations of abuse in the former residential school system, this initiative was promoted by the Assembly of First Nations as the only genuine alternative to all other schooling strategies that were initiated by and controlled by the non-Native community. It called for genuine control and financial capacity to ensure First Nation students of all ages have access to an education system with programs and services grounded in First Nations languages, values, traditions, and knowledge. It has been compromised in fulfilling its promise by a failure of federal funding to match the level of funding made available by provincial governments to public school systems and by the politicization of the school administration from a failure to maintain an arms-length relationship to band administration and funding.

All four of these post-residential school initiatives for Metis and First Nation students, then, are works in progress.

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1997 Rural Teaching and Working Conditions Survey

The Alberta Teachers' Association

As a member of The Alberta Teachers' Association, you have been randomly selected to receive the following survey about the unique problems facing rural Alberta teachers with respect to teaching and working conditions. The information collected from this survey will assist the Committee on Problems of Rural Teachers to ascertain the nature and severity of existing problems and to recommend possible solutions.

Your responses will be treated confidentially. If you have any questions, please call Marvin Hackman, Executive Assistant, Member Services, at 447-9488 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (elsewhere in Alberta).

Your school jurisdiction (please print): ______________________________

Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in your school (for example, a school with 6 full-time teachers and 4 half-time teachers would have an FTE of 8 teachers). Please check (✔) the appropriate category:

☐ Fewer than 5 ☐ 5–10 ☐ 11–20 ☐ 21–30 ☐ More than 30

Indicate the level(s) at which you are currently teaching (check as many categories as are appropriate to your teaching assignment):

☐ ECS ☐ Elementary ☐ Junior High ☐ Senior High ☐ Other

Instructions

The survey asks your opinion on five issues. Questions about each issue are divided into two sections. The first section consists of a number of statements. Use the following five-point scale to indicate the degree to which you believe the situation described in each statement represents a problem for rural teachers.

1. No problem
2. Seldom a problem
3. Undecided/No opinion
4. Often a problem
5. A serious problem

The second section invites you to describe other problems that you encounter and to make additional comments.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by **January 23, 1998.** Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.

I. Professional Issues

(Circle one response for each question)

	No Problem				A Serious Problem
1. I have few opportunities for professional interaction with colleagues teaching the same subject or grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have limited opportunities to participate in professional development activities and/or professional upgrading.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have few opportunities to transfer to other schools in the jurisdiction.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have limited opportunities for promotion within the school jurisdiction.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel that my job is not secure.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I have limited opportunity to affect the decision-making process at the school level.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have limited opportunity to affect the decision-making process at the jurisdiction level.	1	2	3	4	5

Please describe briefly any other *professional issues* you think we should know about.

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II. Instructional Issues

(Circle one response for each question)

	No Problem				A Serious Problem
1. I teach many different courses during each term rather than the same few courses to different classes.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I teach more than one grade or more than one course at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I have limited access to library resources and to such pupil-support services as guidance counsellors, special education coordinators and psychologists.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My school building is in poor repair and is not being restored.	1	2	3	4	5

5. The amount of time that students spend on buses affects their ability to learn and my opportunity to interact with them. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I have limited access to technology. 1 2 3 4 5

Please describe briefly any other *instructional issues* you think we should know about.

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III. Community Issues

(Circle one response for each question)

	No Problem				A Serious Problem
1. My community places unreasonable expectations on teachers to organize extracurricular activities and/or to supervise students.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers are not held in high esteem in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My community places teachers under constant scrutiny with respect to their personal lives.	1	2	3	4	5

Please describe briefly any other *community issues* you think we should know about.

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IV. Personal Issues

(Circle one response for each question)

	No Problem				A Serious Problem
1. I am isolated from friends, family and urban amenities because of where I teach.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Some teachers view teaching in a rural area as less prestigious than teaching in an urban setting.	1	2	3	4	5

3. The public regards teaching in a rural area as less prestigious than teaching in an urban setting. 1 2 3 4 5

Please describe briefly any other *personal issues* you think we should know about.

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The following section is to be filled out by principals, vice-principals and assistant principals only.

V. Administrative Issues

(Circle one response for each question)

	No Problem				A Serious Problem
1. My teaching load interferes with my ability to perform my administrative responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am increasingly expected to engage in public relations/public accountability functions at the expense of my other duties.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Although my responsibilities have increased, I haven't been given sufficient authority to fulfil expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Because of declining enrollments, I have to contend with unusual school configurations and/or school closures.	1	2	3	4	5
5. As a school-based administrator, I spend more and more time carrying out business and management functions rather than providing instructional leadership.	1	2	3	4	5

Please describe briefly any other *administrative issues* you think we should know about.

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