

History Minute – June 2021

I am not telling a Waterloo-Wellington story today. I am going to talk about Residential School cemeteries.

We arrived in Flin Flon, MB in the summer of 1989 – and that fall CBC aired the movie *Where the Spirit Lives* which was a docudrama about the Residential School experience. Then in the spring of 1990 Phil Fontaine talked to a group of Manitoba high school students, talking publicly about his experiences for the first time. I was at the 1992 Assembly when the first Confession was introduced and it was clear that church knew almost nothing about the schools. I have been writing about the schools ever since, a first paper was published in 1994. In 2012, I had a research contract with the TRC. In 2014, I spoke words of confession and apology at the two sites of Cecilia Jeffrey school. In 2017, I spoke words of confession and apology at the Regina Indian Industrial School.

In 1902 as the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School was being established, the three Indigenous Bands in the area and the PCC agreed to a 13-point operating plan. We do not have time to reflect on the meaning of all 13 points – but point 10 and point 13 stand out at the present moment

10) “That if any of a family is seriously ill (sick in bed), the child belonging to them shall be allowed to make a visit.”

Because parents knew that family members died while children were away at school, and that would be traumatic.

13) “...in the case of light sickness they shall be cared for at the school but in the case of serious illness they shall be cared for at home or at the school according to the wishes of the parents.”

Rules like this get made because the parents were aware that in other schools children got seriously ill and parents were not told about it.

Over its history The Presbyterian Church in Canada operated 11 residential schools on 12 sites. Cecilia Jeffrey School had two sites.

Three of the schools were closed before 1925 and are our responsibility as the continuing Presbyterian church – Muscowpetung, Crowstand, and Regina Industrial School all in SK. Six of the schools went into the United Church in 1925 – Ahousat and Alberni in BC; Stoney Plain, AB; File Hills and Round Lake in SK; and Portage le Prairie in Manitoba, Two schools remained Presbyterian – Birtle School in Manitoba and CJ school in Ontario (Kenora).

We know there are cemeteries at Regina Industrial, and both Cecilia Jeffrey sites. I have either been to the sites or seen archival or photographic evidence of those sites.