

May 22, 1973.

Division of Mission in Canada,
United Church of Canada,
85 St. Clair Avenue East,
Toronto, Ont. M4T 1M8

Attention: Rev. Dr. H.M. Bailey, Mrs. E. Loweth,
Dr. Robert C. Rae - and others concerned

Re: Portage La Prairie Presbytery
- Portage Indian Student Residence

Enclosed are photocopies of clippings taken from Winnipeg papers last week re the policy of the federal Department of Indian Affairs on Indian student residences. I have a particular concern for the Portage Indian Student Residence at Portage La Prairie.

We have known for some time that the policy of the federal Department envisages the closing of these residences as educational facilities and opportunities nearer the homes of the students become a reality. It is less than five years ago when the local District Superintendent of Education told me the policy was to have them all phased out in five years. At the present rate this objective will be very nearly achieved.

In the clipping from the Winnipeg Free Press, the Administrator of Portage Residence, Charles Greaves, is quoted as expressing doubt that Portage will close at the end of the academic term in June 1974. I am inclined to disagree with him on this, since the policy is moving forward rapidly. When we relinquished "command" of the Brandon Residence to the Roman Catholics, no one would have predicted closure in two years, but it happened. So I am one who will not be surprised to see Portage closed in June 1974.

This letter is only to make you aware of present events and trends.

I note in a letter from Dr. Bailey, dated April 1, 1971, that "until March 31, 1973 the churches will continue to have the right to nominate to the Department (of Indian Affairs) persons to fill vacancies in the position of Residence Administrators or Child Care Workers in connection with the residential schools". Has there been a further extension of this policy?

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It should be stated that while our official connections with the Portage Indian Student Residence grows less and less, there is still an active interest in the Residence and its people by the Portage La Prairie Presbytery, the United Churches in Portage La Prairie, and Mr. C. Allan Lauder, our Worker Among Indian People in the area. Each, in its own way, recognizes the Residence as part of its "ministry".

RRS:ld
Enc.

Raymond R. Smith,
Conference Staff

Indian Schools Closing

By BARRY MULLIN
Free Press Staff Writer

Two residential school for Indians — one in Winnipeg and one at The Pas, Man. — will be closed this year and two more will be closed in mid-1974. Bill Thomas, regional director of the federal department of Indian Affairs, confirmed Thursday.

The reason for the closures: a lack of enrolment and the fact that Indian people want their children to attend schools near their homes.

"And, quite frankly, we have to agree with them," Mr. Thomas said in an interview Thursday.

An indication of the closure of the Portage Residential School in Portage la Prairie and the MacKay Residential School in Dauphin came Wednesday when Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien said in answer to a question in the House of Commons that the schools may close.

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Mr. Thomas said the Indian affairs department, despite a limited budget, is trying to meet the wishes of the Indian people and provide schools in their immediate areas.

For example, a new school has been built at Garden Hill in the Island Lake region of northeastern Manitoba to accommodate Indian students.

"Student enrolment has dropped in the past and we can see another drop this year. It's only sound planning that a lack of students and the high cost of running the schools must dictate what we do," Mr. Thomas said.

He said the two schools that will close this year are the Assiniboia Residential School, 621 Academy Road, and the Guy Hill Residential School at The Pas.

Both of those schools, Mr. Thomas said, have been operating at about half capacity.

C. A. Greaves, administrator of the Portage la Prairie residence for Indian students, said the present enrolment is about 40 students, or half the residence's capacity.

Enrolment for the 1973-74 year is about 65 per cent and "this is early yet. We haven't heard from a great many of the areas where our students usually come from."

Mr. Greaves explained that the residential schools are not immediately connected with an ordinary school. The students simply live in the residences and attend schools at institutions in the area.

Mr. Greaves expressed some doubt that the Portage residence or the Dauphin residence would close next year.

He said the contents of a letter from the department of Indian affairs states that no action will be taken to close the Portage or Dauphin school without "full consultation with the Indian people concerned."

But he added, when Indian students begin to get all the education they need in the northern areas they come from, then the schools will have to be phased out.

Federal gov't plans to close Indian schools

The four Indian residential schools in Manitoba are to be closed, two at the end of this school term and two by mid-1974, a spokesman of the department of Indian affairs said Thursday.

Bill Thomas department regional director, said the Assiniboia Residential School, 621 Academy Rd., and the Guy Hill Residential School at The Pas are to be closed at the end of this school term.

Mr. Thomas said the Portage Residential School, in Portage la Prairie, and the McKay Residential School, in Dauphin are to be closed next year.

A hint at the fate of residential schools in Dauphin and Portage la Prairie came Wednesday in the House of Commons. Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien, in answer to a question, said the schools might be closed.

REASONS GIVEN

Mr. Thomas gave economic reasons, a lack of enrolment, and the wish of the Indian people to have their children closer to home as the main reasons behind the decision to close the schools.

The two schools being closed this year were operating at "half capacity or less," he said.

Verna Kirkness, director of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood's education-liaison program, said the initial indications are that there may be opposition from the Indian people to the closing of the school in Dauphin.

She added the department has set September, 1974, as

the target date for closing the two schools. The MIB will be working with the parents of the students involved to ensure that they have a say in the matter, she said.

"We want to find out definitely from the people most directly involved — the parents and the students — whether they want the schools closed. We don't want it to be an arbitrary decision made by the Indian affairs department officials," Miss Kirkness said.

SOME OPPOSED

"The indications now are that some of the people may be opposed to the closing of the Dauphin school. Under their system many of the students living within a 100-mile radius of Dauphin spend their weekdays at the school, and then go home for the weekend."

Also, Miss Kirkness added, a number of students come from homes in isolated areas "and if they aren't going to go to Dauphin they'll have to go somewhere else during the school year."

The MIB will work with the boards of management of both schools — Indian parents sit on the board — to help them assess the feelings of the parents. Miss Kirkness said she has not yet heard any reaction from parents of students attending the school at Portage la Prairie.

When the Indian affairs department closed the Brandon Indian residential school last year parents were "upset" at not having been consulted, she said, "and this time we will make sure the parents are involved."