

Chronicles of Providence St-Joseph

Blackfoot Crossing (Cluny). Alberta

July 1963 to June 1972 – (Third book)

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September 3, 1963

School opens again. Some of last year's students go elsewhere for school: Calgary, Cardston, McLeod. As usual, many are late to come in. We register some 280. There should be over 300. Of twenty-one Grade IX pupils last year, thirteen have passed their Departmental Examinations. They continue to study.

October 2, 1963

The new Superintendent of Regional Indian Affairs, Mr. Martin Brodhead, pays a visit to the school today.

October 6, 1963

The Sarcee Indian Reserve near Calgary has been for years under the direction of the Oblate Fathers from here. Reverend Father Poulin's last task while he was here was to build a much needed new church there. The church was almost finished when Father Poulin received his change for Brocket.

Today, the church is blessed by His Excellency Bishop Francis P. Carroll of Calgary. Father Poulin and many priests attend, as well as the Sisters and pupils from here, and the Sisters from Midnapore and from the Crèche in Calgary.

Our pupils were asked to do the singing for the occasion. Soon an intensive effort is put in to learn all the necessary psalms, anthems and hymns in Latin and in English. All went well. The ceremony was a new experience for our pupils. May it teach them to know and love our Holy Mother the Church.

March 3, 1964

Retreats are in order at this time. Our students have theirs this week, preached by Reverend Maurice Goutier, O. M. I. Father Joseph Toole, from Calgary, comes for the last day, and makes it a day of Liturgy and Bible. The Senior students have done some study on and with the Bible, so they are pleased to be able to follow with at least a minimum of understanding.

March 15, 1964

One of our senior boys dies today in Holy Cross Hospital, Calgary, following what seems to be poisoning by what he thought was medicine. Franklin Medicine Shield had gone with the boys of his team for a Championship Basketball game at Drumheller. They won the Trophy and were much elated when their joy was turned [to] sadness on learning of the death of a member of their team. It was a big shock to the whole school. For days, the pupils were so stunned that no one spoke or found anything funny.

All the pupils of the school, and the people of the Reserve, attended the funeral Mass and followed the procession to the Cemetery.

May this tragedy be a reminder to our people, young and old, to “be ready”. May his soul rest in peace.

April 1, 1964

In spite of too short an Easter vacation, and too much to do in this limited time, four Sisters take the afternoon off to visit some of the Indian families. One of our teachers, Miss Eileen O’Halloran, kindly donates her car and her time to drive us to Shouldice, about twelve miles from here, where several of our pupils live. We are well received, and we find some nice homes. Taking contact with the homes creates a friendly feeling which is all to the good in working with the children. We wish we could find time and occasion to do this more often.

May 8, 1964

Today is Open House and Parents’ Day. Due to the continuous rain and muddy roads, some parents cannot come. But many are here to visit the classrooms in which their children are enrolled, to see their work, to speak with the teachers. At three o’clock, parents and pupils and staff gather in the Parish Hall where presentation is made by Mr. Alec H. Murray, Indian Agent, to Reverend Father Georges-Marie Latour, our Principal, of a Fire Safety Award, given by the Department for care and work in Fire Prevention.

May 10, 1964

It has become an annual event here in recent years to have a banquet to honor Grade IX and XII students and their parents. The day is designed as one of thanksgiving, is highlighted by a Mass, followed by a fraternal agape shared by students, parents, staff, and a few official persons representing the Departments of Education and Indian Affairs.

Mr. Stephen Zwarun, our teacher of Industrial Arts, saw to the decoration of the banquet room – the boys’ gymnasium, and as in the past years, the hall was truly beautiful.

Three days earlier, a “Sport Dinner” was served to honor the “sports” of both girls and boys and their parents.

June 14, 1964

An artistic display of the work done in Woodwork, Home Economics, and Classrooms, is laid out in the Parish Hall. Many of the parents are unable to come because of rain and bad roads. Many people from town and surrounding district come to see the achievement of the pupils. They praise highly the work done.

End of June, 1964

The Indian Department, too, is doing hidden work which seems to lead to the disintegration of Catholic Indian Schools. It wants to push the Indian to integrate with the white, and the Indian does not want integration. At least, not yet.

God, who knows second causes, and who can draw benefit from seeming evil, can certainly derive glory and good from what seems to us a hopeless situation.

Many activities of the year, sports of all kinds, outings, social evenings, dinners and banquets, point to the fact that the Sisters have worked hard, and many times without any consolation. The more glory to God.

September 1, 1964

Another innovation is also introduced. A diversified school programme is given in the whole province for students who cannot handle the matriculation work, providing an easier course. So, in order to avoid teaching two programmes in each school, it has been decided that our matriculation students would go to Hobbema Indian School, and their “diploma” pupils would come here. Two of our boys, Melvin White and Thomas McHugh, have gone to Hobbema, and a girl from there, Pauline Buffalo, has come here.

September 18, 1964

Mr. Martin Brodhead, Regional Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Southern Alberta, has called an Institute meeting of all the teachers on Indian Schools for the purpose of organizing the programme for the school year, and guiding the teachers who are new on Indian School Staff. The Institute is held at Rafter-6 Guest Ranch, 45 miles west of Calgary.

December 8, 1964

The students of St. Francis High School in Calgary, over 100 of them, come to spend the day here to meet our students in prayer and sports. They arrive by chartered buses on time for High Mass at 11:00 a. m. on this lovely feast of the Immaculate Conception. The church is literally filled.

All have dinner in the children’s refectories. Then, they meet in a Basketball game in the gymnasium. In various groups, they visit the house and the new school block. For many, it is a new experience. They have never seen a boarding school, and have never met Indian students. Both groups seem to enjoy the occasion. May this fraternal exchange benefit them all.

December 8, 1964

The people of the Reserve, under the direction of Father Maurice Goutier, O. M. I. present an interesting evening of entertainment in the School Gymnasium, to honor and thank Sister Rose Grandpré for her devotedness, kindness and work here for 20 years. The parents, students and personnel of the house are all present. The organizers kept their secret perfectly and made this a real surprise for us all. To add to our astonishment, Mother Provincial, Mother Florence Mary, Sister Beatrice and several Sisters from Midnapore have been invited for the occasion.

Many numbers, songs in groups and in solos, dramatization, words of appreciation by old-timers and parents, bring out the work of the Sisters here over the year, and the devoted services of Sister Rose.

Many thanks to Father Goutier and to the Blackfoot people for this delicate gesture.

February 23, 1966

Sister Jeanne-Léonie, Superior, has started a sewing class with the Indian ladies. One evening a week, a good group of them come and they are all enthusiastic about learning. The few who do

not have sewing machines will get them. This will allow them to save on the budget while keeping up with the fashion of the time.

March 7, 1966

Something different this morning: the school bus brings the parents to meet the teachers and their children. They see with their own eyes what their dear little ones are doing in class. They are very interested in the education of their youngsters and they try to cooperate fully with the teachers.

April 6, 1966

We can be proud of our grown-up students this year in the sports line. They have enriched the school with three new trophies. They came in first in the region in basket ball. In addition, they brought home the All-Province Championship. They brought home a third in the hockey league.

May 13, 1966

During this beautiful month of Mary, twenty-five girls between the ages of eleven and sixteen made their first retreat. All of them tried to keep themselves in recollection. My Sister Blanche, who was in charge of them, prepared readings for them which favored the atmosphere of being alone with their God. They take the opportunity to learn the devotion of the Way of the Cross. Father Marvin Fox of Cardston, Blood Indian, was unable to attend to preach the retreat, so our young people enjoyed the lectures of their own pastor, Father Maurice Goutier. May this beginning continue annually to strengthen the faith of our youth.

June 5, 1966

Each student comes to model the sewing pieces that their teacher, Sister Maria Consolata, has shown them to do.

Sister Jules-Octave also presented her students with the piano. Two of them will take the Royal Conservatory exams. Students and teachers were the pride and admiration of the parents and the whole assembly.

June 12, 1966

The North Indians have their pilgrimage site at Lake St. Anne and the South Indians are beginning to make theirs at Cardston. A big effort is being made this year to mark this day. The Rev. Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate want to bring all the Indians together: Blackfoot, Sarcee, Blood and Piegan at the feet of Mary. The Crowfoot reserve alone had over sixty representatives. May Mary draw all her children from all the reserves to lead them to her Son.

June 16, 1966

Mr. Martin Brodhead, Regional Superintendent of Indian Schools in Southern Alberta leaves us to go to British Columbia, but retaining the same office.

August 7, 1966

To make up for the lack of Catholic teachers in the village school, the President of the Ladies of C.W.L. asked for the favor of having two Sisters to teach catechism to the children of the locality. Sister Maria Consolata and Sister Paul de la Charité willingly accepted this extra effort to give themselves for a week to this apostolic work.

September 1, 1966

All the personnel, teachers, both religious and secular, are at work to receive the students for the new school year. Approximately 330 are registered for grades 1-12, plus 20 little ones for the Nursery School. Of this number, there will be about 70 boarders. This was a great success, considering all the efforts made by some people to convince parents to send their children abroad.

October 3, 1966

Sister Blanche now resumes catechism lessons in the families for the children who attend the neutral schools. Every Tuesday and Thursday, she went to the reserve accompanied by some older girls to teach these dear children. Sister Celine of the Presentation shared this work by going on her own every Wednesday.

October 19, 1966

Our devoted nurse, Mrs. Donald Burrows, leaves us after three years of much appreciated devotion to our day and boarding students.

November 15, 1966

About a year ago, Sister Superior, Sister Jeanne Léonie, started a sewing club with the Indian ladies. This same group now wants to do more for the progress of the reservation. While they were discussing which project would be most favorable, Miss Marie McDonald came to offer her help and encouragement by obtaining for them, on behalf of the parishioners of Calgary, a whole truckload of used linen and furniture which the good parish priest, the Reverend Father Reginald Sullivan, came to drive himself.

This allowed them to make a sale which brought them the beautiful sum of \$600.00 which will be used in their co-op plans.

June 8, 1967

Sister Maria Consolata, household teacher, and Sister Cecile de Jesus, music teacher, joined forces to give us a beautiful musical session and to display the beautiful costumes and dresses that the students had made during the school year.

August 31, 1967

A threat. During the summer months, officials of the Department of Indian Affairs have been canvassing from door to door for high school students, to ween away from Crowfoot in September.

September 5, 1967

Much to our surprise and regret, we realize today that our high school has been taken away completely for no students of grades X, XI, XII show up this opening day. They are attending integrated schools or no school at all for refusing to obey the officials of the Indian Department. Some of the pupils of junior high have returned and these, like many in the elementary grades, will gradually arrive, a few at a time, until the month of November, so organizing classes is a slow process if not an impossible task.

September 6, 1967

A cold lunch. The hot noon-meal served the Day Pupils last year is discontinued this year. A sandwich, a fruit and a beverage is the substitute and many children find this insufficient for their need.

November 20, 1967

A meeting of parents, teachers and government officials is held this evening in the gymnasium. The following employees of Indian Affairs are in attendance: Mr. E. R. Daniels, Mr. M. Rehaluk, E. Dodsall, S. Haslam, H. Rodnunsky, W. McDougall, M. Kartushyn, R. Langdon.

Discussion centre on the usual topics: Closing of the high school, Reserve Roads, Attendance Officer, Adult Education, Central Library, and Recreation Centre. The meeting is favourable to granting help to all the topics on the agenda except the reopening of the high school at Crowfoot. Mr. E. R. Daniels, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, replies that the number of students does not justify the operation of a high school on this reserve.

March 15, 1967

The Institute for Language-Arts is held at the Caravan Inn in Calgary for all teachers of Indian schools in Central Alberta. Mr. E. Dodsall, Superintendent of Indian Schools, plainly says that within three years there will be no more Indian schools as such. All Indian children, by then, will have found their place in non-Indian schools.

March 16, 1967

Congratulations to our junior basketball teams, both girls and boys for earning the South Central championship. In the field of sports, leave it to the Indian to take the lead, even if his non-Indian opponents besmirch his race.

April 5, 1967

The winners of the Speech Contest in grades 4 to 9 which was held in our gymnasium on March 29, today stand in competition at Hobbema, Alberta, with Indians of other schools for the coveted trophy. Our congratulations go to the meriting pupils on each grade: Cheryl Munroe, Florine Sleigh, Delia McMaster and Theresa Big Eye for receiving top honors.

April 24, 1967

Five unexpected public school teachers of Bassano and the adjoining districts who have Indian pupils in their classes have come to watch our teachers execute their teaching skills in the grade

school. All are surprised at the end of the afternoon with the high calibre of work the Indian children are doing here when compared with that being done by their pupils in the public schools.

June 13, 1967

The Home Economics girls are pleased to model the garments they made during the year. These are being sent to the Calgary Exhibition to compete with those made by the pupils in non-Indian schools. Last year, out of the thirty items sent, twelve won prizes and ten were highly recommended.

Intermingled with the display of sewing are music selections played by the pupils of Sister Cecile of Jesus. These too, do honor to their devoted teacher.

But the climax in the afternoon performance is the distribution of trophies won by the competitors in the Speech contest at Hobbema.

June 1968

Summary. Another year has come and gone with not too much change from the previous one. The number of pupils during the year was inconsistent, but the enrollment reached a total of 329 pupils in kindergarten and grades 1 to 9 inclusive. Of this number, approximately 70, of both sexes, were boarders.

[... ..]

The Mormon Church, by means of its Elders, is trying hard to win over the Indians to its belief. It has already taken several of our better students, through bribery, and placed them in families of Mormon faith in order to educate them for the future needs of the reserve.

The Elders, by means of campaigning, from house to house, are also trying to rid the reserve of the drinking problem. Since the opening of the bar to Indians, there have been dissensions, quarrels, broken homes, neglected children, and even suicides. The acme was the burning to death of twelve children.

But the reserve has rejected the plea of the Mormon church to establish a temple on their land.

July 8, 1968

Stampede Days are the great days for the Blackfoot Indians, but they also have their dark side. Because parents are celebrating Stampede Week, fourteen children have been abandoned on the reserve and today, Mr. Roger Many Guns, Police Officer, asks the sisters to care for them until further arrangements can be made for their welfare.

September 21, 1968

To date, there are sixty-seven boarders in residence, but it is being spread around that the boarding school will close its doors at the end of the month. The Department of Indian Affairs, through the District Superintendent of Indian Schools, Mr. Ernest Dossdall, intends having every boy and girl placed in a family by the end of September.

September 30, 1968

Since no notice was given in writing of closing the Residential School, Reverend Father Adrien Charron, O. M. I. flies to Ottawa regarding this matter. He returns with the confirmation that the residence will close, but only at the Christmas Vacation. The number of boarders is now reduced to fifteen, only those children living off the reserve miles away, can be looked after by the residential school.

November 11, 1968

There is lots of hearsay, but no definite information regarding the close of the residential school. After this long weekend, only the eight children from Brocket are to return here. It does seem ridiculous, one sister to look after one pupil, but that is how the residence will operate until December 21st.

November 26, 1968

This evening, Chief Adam Solway meets the sisters in the community room, in order to find out the sisters' opinion on the closing of the residential school. Then he adds that the sisters must remain on the reserve even if it is for visiting and catechising the people. We agreed that this alone is a worthwhile apostolate.

December 1, 1968

At a meeting in the Crowfoot School gymnasium, the Chief, Adam Solway, and two Councillors, Mr. Leo Pretty Youngman, and Jimmy Munroe, out of twelve, were present, as well as fifty families of the reserve. Mr. Edwin Daniels, Superintendent of Indian Education and Mr. Ernest Dodsall, District Superintendent of Indian Schools failed to show at the meeting. Mr. Adam Solway, the chief, was protesting against the closing of the residential school on December 21st. He made demands at Ottawa that a Royal Commission be set up to investigate the purpose of closing doors to so many Indian children in need of care and training.

December 21, 1968

This is the day that the policy is carried out, the policy of the Federal Government. The Crowfoot Residential School is wiped out of existence after seventy years of service to the Blackfoot Reserve. The Indians will now run their own business of looking after their boys and girls. The sisters too, have been shut out, but God will look after them.

- ♦ Translated by Eloi DeGrâce with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)
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Note: Only entries from **February 23, 1966** to **June 8, 1967** were written in French.