

The Mission School

The Christian Endeavor Society operated a school for a short time on IR60 in the 1890's

While the Turtle Mountain – Souris Plains region has never been home to a residential school, the general mission of the residential schools program was somewhat evident in a short-lived effort to provide “education” for the small group of Dakota that lived on IR60* south of Deloraine in the 1890's.

The International Society of Christian Endeavor was an interdenominational organization for Protestant youth in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

In 1892 the Deloraine Branch published a short publication promoting the concept of a reserve school and soliciting funds. It begins with the reminder that although we have many church-run schools across the land, “it is a sad fact that we still have in Canada about 55,000 pagan Indians” and that we “as a Christian people” have an obligation to look after “the temporal and spiritual interests of the Indians. First because we have taken their country.”

The recognition that we have “taken” the livelihood of the people who rightfully owned the land is admirable, as the underlying assumption that European society and its traditions were in every way superior was an all-too-prevalent product of its time.

The pamphlet goes on to remind us that the natives are living in poverty (of body and soul) while the Euro-settlers are swimming in wealth. Unfortunately their bias shows in their description of that poverty: “many of them are perishing in darkness and sin.”

As we Canadians are begin-

ning to acknowledge, some of the same assumptions were at the root of the residential schools disaster. It all started with some good, but often misguided, intentions. But even without abusive teachers, inadequate funds and chronic mismanagement, the flawed concept was bound to fail.

In 1892 the local Endeavor Society obtained some funds and set up a school in a donated cabin on the reserve. Soon, with Rev. A.F. McKenzie and his wife in charge, classes were being held and a garden was being tended by children. They were learning hymns. A night school for young adults was in operation. Neighbouring communities were taking note.

The Deloraine group seems to have taken a leadership position in promoting the idea of on-reserve day schools. A Central Committee was formed in Deloraine in 1894 to “extend the work,” with the goal of “reaching all the neglected bands in the Province...”

The views expressed in the promotional pamphlet display both an understanding of the root of the plight of Indigenous Peoples and an all-too-familiar paternalism and European bias.

“The Indians feel their sad position and their hopeless poverty is as a canker on their hearts, corroding their spirits and blighting the free and noble qualities of their nature. A

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► *The Deloraine branch of the Christian Endeavor Society solicited funds for the Mission School on IR #60.*

short time since an old man was seen sitting on the ground weeping bitterly, when asked why, he replied, ‘I see the prospects of life fading away before my eyes; once we had everything, all the land and all the game, but now we have nothing’.”

While we can take comfort in the fact that they recognized that “The Indians have the same capabilities, the same emotions and aspirations, sorrows and hopes as we have...” we now know that the prescription for “civilizing” them was neither appropriate nor workable. The good news is that Aboriginal cultures have survived, and in this case, some good may well have come out of the local effort.

It seems the school was short lived and that the local Indian agent preferred not to support it. In fact he advocated for closing the reserve and therefore was against any efforts to establish a viable community. He wanted students to attend the residential school in Regina.

Without the support of Indian Affairs, the school faced bankruptcy and closed.

Source:

Central Committee. “An Appeal to the Christian Endeavor Societies, Epworth leagues of Christian Endeavor, and the Christian people of Manitoba. In behalf of our Suffering Indians.” *Boissevain Library & Archives Oral History Collection*. Deloraine. 1894.

MONTHLY OFFERING.

YOUNG - PEOPLE'S

SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

I hereby pledge myself to contribute MONTHLY for one year from.....the sum marked below ; the payment to be made at such times as the Society shall decide.

10c 20c 30c 40c 50c 60c 70c 80c 90c 100

We remain, dear brethren, Yours in
CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR,

Signed in behalf of the { H. L. MONTGOMERY, Chairman.
Central Committee. { C. E. GUTTERIDGE, Secretary.

DELORAINÉ, MAN., MAY 22, 1894.

*IR60 is short form for “Indian Reservation #60”