

Lytton school was headed for a nervous breakdown in 1922. According to Ball, the man was “acting as teacher, minister, janitor and general handy man around the School. He also has charge of the boys [sic] dormitory at night.”⁶²⁰

Staff meals were generally superior to those provided to the students. Staff members, particularly in the early years of the system, had greater immunity than their students to many of the diseases that plagued residential schools. Despite this, the living conditions that prevailed in many schools took a toll on staff. In 1896, E. B. Glass, the principal of the Whitefish Lake school in what is now Alberta, said the deterioration in the health of one staff member was the result of having to work in an inadequately heated and poorly insulated schoolhouse in which the “cold wind whistled up through the floor.” Glass said that “the Department which charges itself with building, repairing and furnishing school houses, should also charge itself with neglect and the suffering endured by the teacher from that neglect.”⁶²¹

Disease and illness also claimed the children of married staff members. Emma Crosby, who helped found the Crosby Girls’ Home in Port Simpson in the late 1870s, buried four of her children at Port Simpson. Two of them had succumbed to diphtheria.⁶²² Elizabeth Matheson, the wife of the Onion Lake principal, lost a daughter to whooping cough and a son to meningial croup in the early years of the twentieth century.⁶²³ During her fourth pregnancy, Elizabeth Matheson was so depressed that she considered suicide.⁶²⁴

Missionary staff, particularly in the early years of the system, were extremely hostile to Aboriginal culture.⁶²⁵ They commonly described Aboriginal people as “lazy.”⁶²⁶ The long-time principal of the Shubenacadie school in Nova Scotia, J. P. Mackey, was expressing these views in the 1930s. In one letter, he described Aboriginal people as natural liars. “For myself, I never hope to catch up with the Indian and his lies, and in fact I am not going to try.”⁶²⁷ Others, however, spoke out on behalf of Aboriginal people. Hugh McKay, the superintendent of Presbyterian missionary work among Aboriginal people, criticized the federal government for failing to implement its Treaty promises and for failing to alleviate the hunger crisis on the Prairies.⁶²⁸ Similarly, William Duncan, the Anglican missionary at Metlakatla, British Columbia, advised the Tsimshian on how to advance arguments in favour of Aboriginal title.⁶²⁹

Sometimes, staff protested the way students were treated. When two staff members of the Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, school resigned in 1952, they complained of the harsh disciplinary regime at the school.⁶³⁰ In 1957, Helen Clifton, an ex-dormitory supervisor, wrote of how, at the Lytton, British Columbia, school, “the ‘strap’ is altogether too much in evidence.”⁶³¹

Aboriginal people also worked for the schools. The Mohawk Institute hired former student Isaac Barefoot to work as a teacher in 1869. Barefoot went on to serve as acting principal and was later ordained as an Anglican minister.⁶³² Another former student, Susan Hardie, obtained her teaching certificate in 1886.⁶³³ She was the school governess as early as 1894, and was paid \$200 a year.⁶³⁴ She retired at the beginning of the 1936–37