

the students, since he would “always try to marry them as soon as they leave the school.” He wanted to keep one eighteen-year-old student in the school until the fall threshing was complete. Then, she would be married to a former pupil. He wanted to keep another eighteen-year-old until “she gets married during the year.”³¹¹ In 1922, the head of the Presbyterian Church’s Winnipeg Committee on Indian Work urged the government to make it “unlawfull [sic] for a pupil or ex-pupil of the School to marry or be married without the permission of the Indian Agent.” The Presbyterians proposed that the children of such unauthorized marriages be denied Treaty annuities until they reached the age of twenty-one and be prohibited from attending school.³¹² Although the measure was not adopted, it is reflective of the church’s lack of respect for the autonomy of Aboriginal people.

Food: “Always hungry”

In his memoir of his years as a student at the Mount Elgin school in southern Ontario in the early twentieth century, Enos Montour wrote that the boys “were always hungry. Grub was the beginning and end of all conversations.”³¹³ According to Eleanor Brass, the dinners at the File Hills, Saskatchewan, school consisted “of watery soup with no flavour, and never any meat.” One winter, it seemed to her that they ate fish every day.³¹⁴ In fair weather, the boys would trap gophers and squirrels, and roast them over open fires to supplement their meagre diets. Sometimes, they would share these treats with the girls at the school.³¹⁵ Mary John, who attended the Fraser Lake, British Columbia, school, recalled that the meals were dull and monotonous: a regular diet of porridge interspersed with boiled barley and beans, and bread covered with lard. Weeks might go by without any fish or meat; sugar and jam were reserved for special occasions.³¹⁶ A former student of the Hay River school in the Northwest Territories recalled that in the years following the First World War, he “didn’t see jam from the time I got off the boat to the time I got back on to come back down.”³¹⁷ Another student from that school recalled a constant diet of fish: “They would boil it up real good until the meat falls away, the bones and scales all floating around, then mix in flour and serve it up. I won’t use flour for my dogs because there’s not much good in it.”³¹⁸

The reports of government inspectors confirm these student memories. An 1895 report on an inspection of the Middlechurch school concluded, “The ‘bill of fare’ is plain. I believed it to be barely sufficient for the older pupils, who have now, at fifteen to eighteen years of age, larger appetites [sic] than they will have when older.”³¹⁹ In 1918, Indian agent John Smith inspected the Kamloops school and reported his “suspicion that the vitality of the children is not sufficiently sustained from a lack of nutritious food, or enough of the same for vigorous growing children.”³²⁰ A local doctor concurred, writing that “for some months past the food supplied has been inadequate for the needs of the children.”³²¹ There were some positive assessments, but Indian Affairs official Martin Benson questioned