

behalf of children who had been injured working at the schools, and to attempt to have their children discharged from school.<sup>537</sup>

One of the more unusual protests was mounted by First Nations people (Dene) in the Northwest Territories, who, in 1937, refused to accept their Treaty payments in protest of conditions at the Fort Resolution school. Their children, they said, were “living in hell.”<sup>538</sup>

Residential schools also came under criticism from early First Nations organizations. At its meeting in Saddle Lake, Alberta, in 1931, the League of Indians of Canada called for the construction of more day schools to augment residential schools.<sup>539</sup> The following year, the league, by then known as the League of Indians of Western Canada, called for the closure of boarding schools.<sup>540</sup> The league also recommended that only qualified teachers be hired to work at residential schools, that medical examinations be given to students before they were sent to the schools, and that the half-day system be changed to allow for greater class time.<sup>541</sup>

In an effort to bring their own residential schooling to an end, some students attempted to burn their schools down. There were at least thirty-seven such attempts, two of which ended in student and staff deaths.<sup>542</sup> For students, the most effective form of resistance was to run away. The principal of the Shingwauk Home in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, school in the 1870s, E. F. Wilson, devoted a chapter of his memoirs to the topic of “Runaway Boys.” It included the story of three boys who tried to make their way home by boat. They were found alive more than ten days later, stranded on an island in the North Channel of Lake Huron.<sup>543</sup>

After 1894, children enrolled in a residential school (or who had been placed there by government order because it was felt that they were not being properly cared for by their parents) but who were refusing to show up at school were considered to be “truant.” Under the *Indian Act* and its regulations, they could be returned to the school against their will. Children who ran away from residential schools were also considered to be truants. Parents who supported their children in their truancy were often threatened with prosecution.<sup>544</sup>

Most runaway students headed for their home communities. Students knew they might be caught, returned, and punished. Still, they believed the effort to make it home and have a measure of freedom was worth it. In some cases, in fact, the schools failed to force run-aways to return.<sup>545</sup> Some students eluded capture. Instead of heading home, some went to work for local farmers and, as a result, were able to avoid their pursuers for considerable periods of time.<sup>546</sup>

Running away could be risky. At least thirty-three students died, usually due to exposure, after running away from school.<sup>547</sup> In a significant number of cases, parents and Indian Affairs officials concluded that the deaths could have been prevented if school officials had mounted earlier and more effective searches and notified police officials and family members.<sup>548</sup> In the case of Charles and Tom Ombash, two brothers who ran away from the Sioux Lookout school on October 5, 1956, school officials waited until November before