

school year.⁶³⁵ A young Oneida woman, Miss Cornelius, taught at the Regina school in the early twentieth century.⁶³⁶ She left the following year, lured away to a better paying school in the United States.⁶³⁷ In the early 1930s, the Brandon school hired former student Lulu Ironstar as a teacher.⁶³⁸ But these were exceptions, not the rule. As late as 1960, there were only twenty-three First Nations teachers working in residential schools across the country. Nineteen taught academic subjects and the other four taught home economics and industrial arts.⁶³⁹ Stan McKay, who was educated at the Birtle and Brandon residential schools, taught in the Norway House, Manitoba, school in the 1960s. Although there was much that he enjoyed about the work, he left after two years. In his opinion, the education he was being forced to provide was not relevant to the lives of the children. There was, for example, a heavy emphasis on English, and no recognition of the role of Cree in the communities from which the children came. “They were doomed to fail under the system that existed. The majority of them would certainly and did.”⁶⁴⁰



Miss Cornelius, an Oneida woman, taught at the Regina, Saskatchewan, school in the early twentieth century. Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B992.

Verna Kirkness, who was raised on the Fisher River First Nation in Manitoba, taught at both the Birtle and Norway House schools.⁶⁴¹ She did not like the atmosphere at the Birtle school, where, she felt, administrators discouraged students from spending additional time with her. In her memoir, she wrote that she “wondered if they were afraid the children would tell me things about their lives away from the classroom.”⁶⁴²

It was in the 1960s that a number of Aboriginal people were promoted to the position of school principal. Ahab Spence, a former residential school student, was appointed principal of the Sioux Lookout school in 1963.⁶⁴³ Under Spence’s administration, the school had a staff of twenty-three, half of whom were Aboriginal.⁶⁴⁴ Colin Wasacase became the principal of the Presbyterian school in Kenora in 1966.⁶⁴⁵ In keeping with past practice, his wife was made school matron.⁶⁴⁶ This trend continued into the 1970s, when Aboriginal people were appointed to administrative positions at numerous residential schools, including those in Mission and Kamloops, British Columbia; Blue Quills, Alberta; Prince Albert, Duck Lake, and Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan; and Fort George, Québec.⁶⁴⁷ Although the total number of schools declined rapidly from 1969 onwards, they became a significant source of Aboriginal employment, particularly in Saskatchewan, where six schools were operated