

## **An era is coming to an end at red brick Indian school**

Special to The Province

KAMLOOPS -- For nearly half a century the Kamloops Indian Residential School -- a long, three-storey, red brick building reminiscent of Edwardian days -- has stood majestically overlooking the South Thompson River where it sweeps from between sun bleached rocky hills into Kamloops.

Here, Kamloops Indian band chief Clarence Jules studied in the polished, wooden walled classrooms, as did U.B.C. graduate Leonard Marchand, executive assistant to Indian Affairs Minister Arthur Laing. Since it was constructed in 1923, thousands of Indian children have come and gone out into the world from its stately corridors, balustraded staircases and long halls.

But today, progress dictated by a white man's world, is catching up with the Indian Residential School, the largest in B.C. By September 1969, classroom education will be completely phased out and an era will come to an end. "Of course, it won't be the end," declared Principal Rev. Allan F. Noonan, a lively, fast talking Catholic priest who hailed originally from Prince Edward Island. "The school will be known as the Kamloops Students' Residence, a hostel for Indian children and we'll have a new role to play and our responsibilities will be greater.

"People appear to misunderstand the conception of phasing out. Only classroom education is being discontinued, in fact higher grade classes have already been terminated here."

Until 1959, the 350-student school was completely segregated with its own teachers and administration staff looking after 12 grades. Since then, Grades 7 and up have been gradually integrated, either with St. Ann's Academy, or public schools in Kamloops.

Classes for Grades 4, 5 and 6 will come to an end this September, and a year later the three primary grades will be integrated with public schools.

"Integration cannot be rushed, and the students are going at a rate they can handle in Kamloops," said Father Noonan, adding that similar integration programs are also taking place in Williams Lake, Lytton and Alberni. Two huge classroom blocks, standing apart from the main building and were later additions, will not fall into disuse. The Oblate Fathers who govern and run the Residential School -- it's financed by the federal government -- have offered use of one block to the Kamloops School District, always hard pressed for accommodation.

The school, or hostel as it will be known, will continue to play an important role in the lives of the Indian children while they are out of city schools.

Father Noonan envisages the hostels' future role as developing culture and encouraging full participation in sports and social activities.



FATHER ALLAN NOONAN

"You can't take a young kid off the reserve and put him in a public school, just like that. For most of them it's a strange world--the world of the white man--and it's too much of a shock. "One of our roles will be to prepare children for this new world."

He admits the necessity and practical advantages of integration, but sadly points out there is not one Indian teacher in Kamloops schools. "There is a great need for Indian teachers in public schools, someone the kids can identify themselves with and look up to.

"Some things really worry me. Public schools have a wide open education system. Do we or the educators really know what value it has? How valid is it? Does it help Indian kids? How many people understand Indian culture sufficiently to be able to tell them more than just they are descended from the Chinese? Culture is not something that rubs off from one person to another."

For an Indian boy and girl to walk along holding hands is a common event in their society, it is a traditional and accepted practice. "Indians are like that, but if they do it in a public school, white children will laugh with embarrassment and it could lead to trouble through failure to understand each other's society. Integration is not an easy accomplishment."

The Kamloops Indian Residential School already acts as a hostel for the 50 boys and 50 girls who daily catch the buses for the city high schools. They are accommodated in a modern, airy annex, built several years ago. Here the students live in bright dormitories -- six to a room -- eat in a well furnished dining hall which could put many Canadian restaurants in the shade, and study or relax in large recreation rooms in the basement.

Record players, television sets, a billiard table, deep, comfortable settees and armchairs, a comprehensive library of fiction, non-fiction and text books, have been

adopted from a white man's world, and only paintings, drawings and picture mosaics of Indian scenes and people, decorating the walls and corridors indicate the presence of another culture, another world.

Regular socials, parties and Saturday night dances are now being attended by white friends met in city high schools, and sometimes Indian students spend evenings at the homes of school friends in the city. "Integration is easier for older students. There is more understanding," said Father Noonan.

Since before the turn of the century, there has been an Indian school on the Kamloops Reserve. A fire prompted the building of the present school in 1923. Only a few years ago, the school operated a large farm and a prize dairy herd helped support the establishment with vegetables and milk, and afforded agricultural training for older students. It even possessed its own slaughter house. Through the years, the farm gave way to playing fields, avenues of trees and a large swimming pool, and land not required was handed back to the Indian band.

The students come from reserves in such areas as Lillooet, Merritt, Salmon Arm, Vernon and the Kamloops region.

"The children are not here from broken homes," said Father Noonan. "That is a common misunderstanding. They are here because they have the choice of staying on a reserve where housing may be inadequate and conditions are not suitable for study, or coming here for a good secondary school education.

Some people think all the kids here are on welfare. We have only 14 in that position out of 350. This may sound harsh, but we don't want welfare kids because we are geared to handle children who have parents, who have a place of permanency, and can go home during the holidays. Welfare kids come to a dead end when they leave school here because there is no follow up program, no one to take an interest in them."

The welfare department agrees and is doing its best to find foster homes for the 14 children. "It's really rough to find foster homes -- good Indian foster homes."

Assistance and encouragement in integration is given by the school in that all students belong to some form of youth group or organization, such as cadet forces, cubs, brownies, scouts and guides. The students have made a name for themselves in sports, and recently brought home the B.C. Indian Basketball trophy, while the polished sounds of their trumpet band and displays by the dancing group are now familiar and welcome events in district ceremonies and functions.

One of the major advantages of Indian students attending public schools, said Father Noonan, is the vocational training which enables students to go on to become nurses,

secretaries, and hairdressers, heavy duty mechanics, carpenters, bakers, chefs and foresters.

Recently, three girls living at the Residential School and attending St. Ann's Academy in Kamloops were selected to present a paper at the University of Victoria's Second Annual Humanities and Science Symposium. They were Nancy Michel, Mary Jane Sterling and Judy Swakum who dealt with the culture past and present of the interior Salish Indian, an informative, thought-provoking work which compared the two cultures, emphasized the necessity and advantages of a modern education for Indians, but concluded by saying: "No matter how modern the Indians become, they should never forget their native language, their culture and their heritage."

When classroom education at the Kamloops Indian Residential School is phased out in September 1969, promotion of culture is one of the important roles the hostel will continue to play.

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**The Province**

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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