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FROM INSTRUMENT TO EVIDENCE

by Magdalena Miłosz

Selections from an archive of assimilation.

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The collections of Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the repository of nationally significant documents, contain an extensive store of architectural records chronicling the work of the Canadian government as well as architects and firms in private practice. Among these archives is a substantial collection of plans generated by the Department of Indian Affairs, the federal arm that historically managed indigenous-Canadian relations and, until the 1970s, implemented policies that explicitly aimed to segregate and assimilate indigenous peoples.[1]

These drawings, which date from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1980s, demonstrate the ways in which the government used architecture as a significant tool to enact its racist policies, constructing entire built worlds—the notorious residential schools where indigenous children were taken to be assimilated into mainstream Canadian society, as well as on-reserve day schools, houses, churches, council-houses, jails, hospitals and farm buildings. The documentary remnants of these projects, built and unbuilt, locate these building typologies within the colonial agenda: whether carried out on the reserves to displace traditional ways of living on the land, or off the reserves, in the case of residential schools that were intended to indoctrinate children into Euro-Canadian customs.

THE FIRST GENERATION: MISSIONARY SCHOOLS, THE INDIAN ACT AND THE DAVIN REPORT

Although the greater part of the Indian Affairs architectural archive dates from the twentieth century, its origins can be traced to the Indian Act of 1876. The Act, which consolidated sweeping federal powers over indigenous populations, still remains "the principal statute through which the federal government administers Indian status, local First Nations governments and the management of reserve land and communal monies."[2] It incorporated both the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857, which promoted the elimination of First Nations through voluntary enfranchisement—the relinquishment of legal Indian status in exchange for land and the right to vote—and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, which aimed to replace traditional indigenous governance structures with band councils, a form of non-traditional government imposed on First Nations.[3] In addition, it gave the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs a great deal of control over the lives and lands of status Indians (a legal term used to refer to First Nations individuals registered as such with the Canadian government). The same racist agenda was written into the very foundation of Canada in the Constitution Act of 1867, which gave the fledgling state the authority to legislate for "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians."[4]

Three years after the Indian Act was passed, Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, engaged Nicholas Flood Davin, an English journalist, to investigate boarding schools for indigenous children in the United States as a possible model for assimilation in Canada. Based on his visit, Davin, who later became a member of parliament, advised that a federally funded system of industrial schools should be established throughout the country.[5] He reported that in the USA, "the industrial school is the principal feature of the policy known as 'aggressive civilization'" and was preferred over the establishment of day schools on reserves as "the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school."[6] This culturally imperialistic architectural metaphor—in which the wigwam stood in for indigenous culture and the school for settler culture—reinforced a certain association between "civilization" and the built environment. It revealed the true aim of these schools, in both the US and Canada, as the separation of indigenous children from their families in order to prevent the perpetuation of traditions, leading to the eventual elimination of indigenous cultures. This cultural separation was maintained by the location of the schools, which were mostly off reserve and often several days' travel away from the children's communities.

Only a year after the report was published, the government took over responsibility for the education of indigenous children, providing funding and policy direction. However, the day-to-day operation of the existing missionary schools remained the responsibility of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches.[7] These earlier schools for indigenous children mimicked the domestic environment of Euro-Canadian houses of the time. Bedrooms and dormitories for the staff and children were located above the ground-floor educational functions, including academic classrooms and industrial training facilities. The chief purpose of these "first generation Indian schools" was to carry out the full assimilation of children into Euro-Canadian society—a project that demanded an architecture that would facilitate training in occupations such as trades and farming for boys and homemaking for girls.[8] Historian Janet Wright writes, "the design of these schools, which was firmly rooted in white society, was clearly intended to support and reinforce the values, skills, and codes of behaviour in which the students were so rigorously indoctrinated."[9] North American settlers imagined an inherent link between "civilization" and the reorganization of space to suit Western modes of life and thought. This so called "infrastructure of 'civilization'—villages with day schools, churches, European houses and ploughed fields" was indispensable in carrying out the assimilatory goals of both the religious orders and the government.[10]

Students, nuns and priests posing in front of St. Joseph's Indian Industrial School, High River, Alberta, 1896. Source: Library and Archives Canada, David Ewens Collection, e006610127.

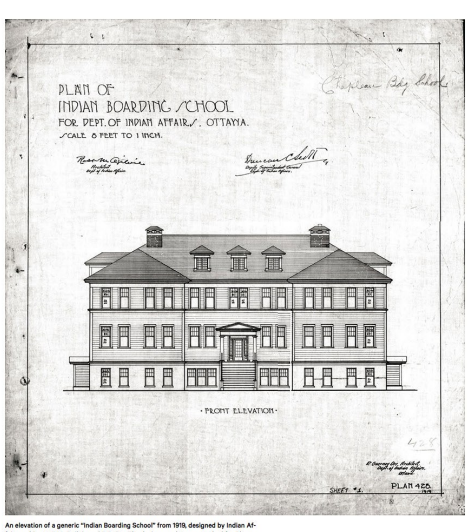
Only after federal funding of schools began in 1880 do the first records of architects employed by Indian Affairs appear. In 1881, a firm called Paul & Son was engaged to work on a new school house for the Mississaugas of Alnwick, Ontario and in 1886, a government architect identified only as Mr. Henderson designed several small structures at the Roman Catholic St. Joseph Industrial School in High River, Alberta. [11] The smaller on-reserve day schools, which were attended by children who continued to live at home, were often one- or two-classroom buildings similar to typical settler schoolhouses. These were constructed by Indian Affairs, as were residential or boarding schools, which were similar to the earlier off-reserve missionary schools. Some larger industrial schools, including St. Paul's in Manitoba (also known as Rupert's Land Industrial School) or the Regina Indian Industrial School in Saskatchewan, were built by the Department of Public Works—the governmental branch responsible for federal architecture at large.[12] These various school typologies were the beginning of direct federal involvement in building for indigenous peoples, leading to a more centralized system of architectural production that supplanted the more informal processes of the missionaries. This change indicated Canada's growing involvement in both religious conversion and secular "civilization," aimed at completely assimilating indigenous peoples into mainstream Canadian settler society.

Architectural view of St. Paul's (Rupert's Land) Indian Industrial School ca. 1890. Source: Library and Archives Canada, David Ewens Collection, e006611015.

THE SECOND GENERATION: CENTRALIZATION

The second generation of Indian schools developed by the federal government in the twentieth century were institutional—with large, open dormitories on the upper floors and often a chapel or assembly hall comprising a back wing. The shifting purpose of the schools, from assimilation based on industrial training in trades to a program of segregation and cultural decimation, is reflected in both the architectural evolution of these institutions and their educational models.[13] The newer schools focused on delivering a basic curriculum with a half-day of manual labour to defray operational costs, but little effort on the part of government, churches, or the (often-underqualified) teachers to impart useful skills or aid in academic success. The schools continued to be operated by the churches, and the religious program remained a strong element of residential school life. Having spent years away from home in a state of cultural confusion, returning to their communities only in the summer, many of the graduates were left prepared for neither a "traditional" way of life on the reserve nor to become functional in mainstream Canadian society. This pattern of cultural disrespect and separation of children from their families has often been noted by survivors of these institutions as their most harmful practices, leading to the intergenerational trauma still experienced by indigenous communities.

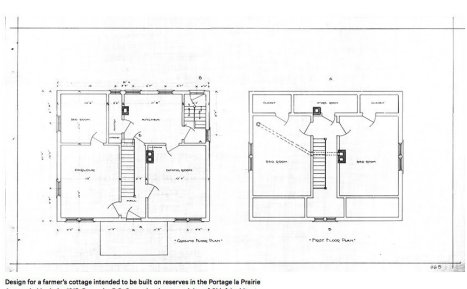
By 1931, there were eighty residential schools across the country—the highest number in the history of the system. This period of expansion was characterized by the work of architects Robert Mitchell Ogilvie, who came to the Department of Indian Affairs in 1905 after practising in Toronto and Hunstville, and Roland Guerney Orr, whose father had held several different positions within the Department. Having had no formal architectural education, Orr learned the profession as a draftsman under Ogilvie, and took over his post as Chief Architect of Indian Affairs after Ogilvie's death in 1921. [14]



An elevation of a generic "Indian Boarding School" from 1919, designed by Indian Affairs architects R.M. Ogilvie and R.G. Orr. The design was later earmarked for Chapleau, Ontario, according to ephemera in the upper-right corner. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, item # 302-311.

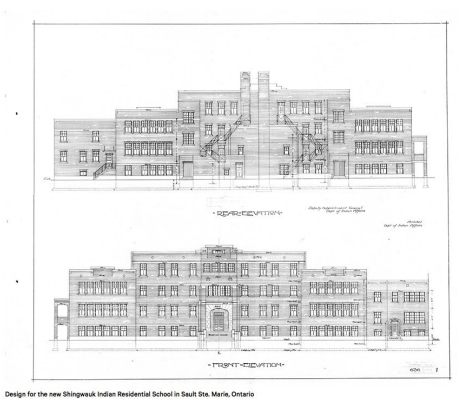
As government policy focused on cultural annihilation rather than assimilation into settler society, Indian Affairs expanded their architectural work beyond the schools to include new houses, churches, council-houses and jails, altering the built landscapes of reserves themselves. Repeatable housing designs for those living on reserves, as well as specific designs for temporary inhabitants like schoolteachers, translators and Indian agents (representatives of the federal government) demonstrated the extent to which the Canadian government enforced its policies through the built environment (Figures 04-05). These buildings served as markers or symbols of Euro-Canadian dominance on the reserve—actively transforming the population into productive participants in the settler economy while folding them into European notions of domesticity and forms of justice

Design for a farmer's cottage intended to be built on reserves in the Portage la Prairie Agency in Manitoba 1915. Drawn by R.G. Orr under the supervision of Chief Architect R.M. Ogilvie. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, NMC177717.

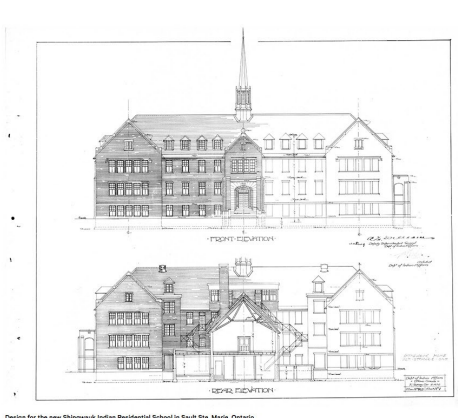


Design for a farmer's cottage intended to be built on reserves in the Portage la Prairie Agency in Manitoba 1915. Drawn by R.G. Orr under the supervision of Chief Architect R.M. Ogilvie. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, NMC177718.

The projects that Roland Guerney Orr completed under Ogilvie drew on the neoclassical vocabulary (Figures 03-05), consistent with prevailing trends in North American institutional and residential architecture in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, once Orr became Chief Architect, he shifted away from the aesthetics and historical symbolism of neoclassicism to the Collegiate Gothic style popularly used in colleges and high schools in the United States and Canada. Later, in the 1930s, he embraced a version of Classical Moderne or PWA Moderne, as it was commonly known in the United States (in reference to the Public Works Administration) (Figures 06-07).[15] The influence of new European and American architectural styles served as an extension of the symbolic capital contained in earlier architecture produced by the Department of Indian Affairs—ever-present reminders of state power and the dominance of Western culture over indigenous populations.



Design for the new Shingwauk Indian Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario that underwent a significant change during a two-year hiatus brought on by the Depression. The original drawings by R.G. Orr from 1932 reveal a Classical Moderne design similar to other schools built around 1930. A second version of the design from 1934 (constructed in 1935), depicts a Collegiate Gothic design akin to Orr's earlier work from the 1920s. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, 1211-1268.



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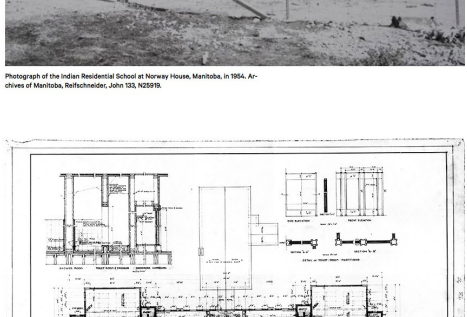
THE THIRD GENERATION: COLONIAL MODERNISM

The continued expansion of residential schools after WWII occurred in the context of shifting Indigenous-Canadian relations. For the first time, the government consulted with First Nations regarding proposed changes to the Indian Act and, in 1951, removed the more extreme political, cultural and religious restrictions, like the prohibition of the Sun Dance and potlatch tradition. These reforms were, however, also accompanied by new restrictions on women, including the loss of Indian status when marrying a non-status man, the prohibition of alcohol and the extension of provincial laws to reserves.

In the case of school design, these backhanded reforms were presumably reflected in the adoption of a modernist style, but remained influenced by the government's colonialist and paternalist attitudes towards indigenous peoples. The residential school at Norway House, Manitoba provides an appropriate example—completed in 1954, it is the picture of mid-century modern, with clean lines that would have stood out in any Canadian town (Figure 08). But behind this modernist screen, the plan remained entirely symmetrical: two wings contained classrooms on the ground floor, dormitories above and a rear wing comprising the chapel, assembly room and dining hall (Figure 09). This design had been used in Canada since the early twentieth century, including those buildings by Orr from the 1920s and 30s, whereas the layout dates back to English industrial schools from at least 1870.[16]

Photograph of the Indian Residential School at Norway House, Manitoba, in 1954. Archives of Manitoba, Reifschneider, John 133, N25919.



Second floor plan of the Indian Residential School at Norway House, Manitoba, designed by architect W.E. Noffke in 1952. At the time of this design, Indian Affairs was, ironically, the concern of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.© Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, 997.

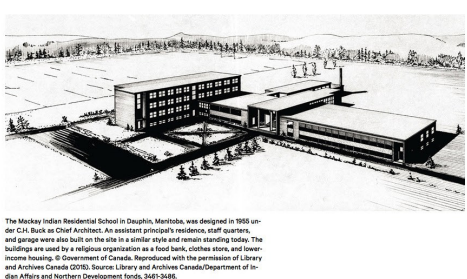
The Department of Indian Affairs went through numerous structural changes throughout the 1950s and 60s, eventually becoming part of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in 1966. More importantly, the middle of the century was a time when indigenous peoples in Canada joined the worldwide struggle of colonized populations for self-determination. By the mid-1970s, most residential schools were closed or turned over to First Nations communities, and the National Indian Brotherhood was formed in 1968—a predecessor to the contemporary Assembly of First Nations. Indian Affairs continued to be involved in design and construction on reserves until 1987, when these services were integrated within Public Works Canada, the department responsible for federal building projects.[17]

THE ARCHIVAL GENERATION: INSTRUMENTS AS EVIDENCE

In typical practice, instruments of service are retained for a number of years, often for litigation protection and legacy creation.[18] Within the government's architectural production, their retention may serve the additional purpose of revealing acts of material significance executed during periods of systemic oppression. As typically understood, service is associated with help or assistance; in the practice of architecture, architects use instruments to assist clients in realizing projects. How does one define service within architecture that furthers colonization? What does "service" mean when it is used in an attempt to erase entire cultural groups from the landscape of a nation?

Aside from historian Geoffrey Carr's work, little attention has been paid to the expansive body of architectural work produced by Indian Affairs. Despite the thousands of projects undertaken by this department for over a century, as well as their attendant impact on the built environment and cultural spaces of indigenous communities, these structures and their means of production remain invisible to mainstream Canadian society.[19] Yet the drawings and other representations of these projects archived at LAC are evidence of the immense resources poured into the government's project of assimilation. Its Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, containing "records pertaining to the construction and maintenance of buildings, homes, schools, roads, bridges and water systems on Indian reserves throughout Canada," consists of 8,687 architectural drawings and 3,166 technical drawings created between 1913 and 1982.[20]

Very little of the catalogued material has been digitized. Instead, most of the documents are copies, duplicated on microfiche and held in tiny drawers on the top floor of the LAC building in Ottawa. Original drawing sets are retained in a facility across the river in Gatineau, Quebec, as well as at three federal regional service centres spread across the country in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Vancouver, British Columbia.



The Mackay Indian Residential School in Dauphin, Manitoba, was designed in 1955 under C.H. Buck as Chief Architect. An assistant principal's residence, staff quarters, and garage were also built on the site in a similar style and remain standing today. The buildings are used by a religious organization as a food bank, clothes store, and lower-income housing. © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2015). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development fonds, 3461-3486.

The LAC archive transforms instruments of service into instruments of evidence, demonstrating for whom—or to whom—a service was rendered. In practice, instruments of service constitute the architect's "product" and are treated as tools in the construction of a building. As evidence, they become tools of a different sort. Through their scrutiny within a broader context, we can further the understanding of the totalizing political landscape of the Indian Act and the Canadian government's difficult history with indigenous peoples leading to the present moment.

In the words of Jacques Derrida, "the archive should *call into question* the coming of the future."[21] This understanding of the archive necessitates an interrogation of what is yet to come more than a straightforward inquiry into the past. As the settler state of Canada examines its problematic relationship with indigenous peoples, what role can these archived instruments of service play in negotiating the future? How does the archive help account for the architect's responsibility in carrying out systemic policies of racism and assimilation?

The recently established National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) in Winnipeg, Manitoba will play a crucial role in answering questions like these. Following the recent conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's seven-year mandate, the NCTR will steward and make the extensive archive on the residential school era consisting of both survivor testimony gathered by the Commission and government documents, including architectural drawings, available digitally.[22]

According, again, to Derrida, the political effects of this change of ownership are not to be underestimated: "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."[23]

The dispersal of the architectural archive of Indian Affairs will begin to reveal a little-known aspect of the government's extensive power over indigenous peoples and the significant historical impact its architectural practices have had on these communities. As the instruments shift from "service" to evidence, new questions will emerge about the visible and invisible intentions of architecture—and what purpose the architect "serves."

1. Throughout the twentieth century, the department underwent several name changes and restructurings. In 2011, it became Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development under Stephen Harper's Conservatives, and recently changed to Indigenous and Northern Affairs under Justin Trudeau's Liberals. ^
2. William B. Henderson, "Indian Act," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, edited by Davida Aronovitch (Historica Canada, 2015), last modified May 25, 2015, http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act. ^
3. Only one individual voluntarily enfranchised under the Gradual Civilization Act. ^
4. Government of Canada, "Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982," last modified December 4, 2014, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-4.html. ^
5. Nicholas Flood Davin, "Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds" (Winnipeg, MB: 1879), 2, http://archive.org/details/cihm_03651/. ^
6. Ibid., 1. ^
7. After 1925, all Methodist and most Presbyterian schools were run by the United Church of Canada. ^
8. Geoffrey Carr, " 'House of No Spirit,' An Architectural History of the Indian Residential School in British Columbia (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2011), footnote 3, 42. ^
9. Janet Wright, *Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867-1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 61. ^
10. John Milloy, "Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour, 1869-1969," research paper for the National Centre for First Nations Governance, May 2008, 5, http://fngovernance.org/ncfng_research/milloy.pdf. ^
11. Henderson's undertakings were also an early example of the use of student labour to complete construction at a residential school, a practice that continued into the twentieth century. Government of Canada, "Indian Affairs Annual Reports, 1864-1990," 1886, 143. ^
12. Wright, *Crown Assets*, 61. ^
13. Carr, 42. ^
14. For further examples of R.G. Orr's work in the context of Indian Affairs architecture, see Magdalena Miłosz, "Houses, Schools, Hospitals: 'Indian' Architecture and the Design of Genocide in Canada," *Unmaking Things*, June 26, 2014, http://unmakingthings.rca.ac.uk/2014/houses-schools-hospitals-indian-architecture-and-the-design-of-genocide-in-canada/. ^
15. This style was also well used by the Canadian government in many federal buildings of the era. Wright, *Crown Assets*, 177. ^
16. The 1870 plan of an industrial school at Ardwick, UK, for example, is quite similar to that of the Norway House school. See E.R. Robson, *School Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1874; New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 357, fig. 248. ^
17. Government of Canada, "Indian Affairs Annual Reports," 1987 – 1988, 67, http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/first-nations/indian-affairs-annual-reports/Pages/item.aspx?idNumber=39815 ^
18. Evan H. Shu and Tawny Ryan Nelb, "Retaining and Archiving Records," in Joseph A. Demkin, *The Architect's handbook of Professional Practice*, Fourteenth Edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 0;ref="http://www.aia.org/aia ucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aiab086366.pdf">http://www.aia.org/aiaucmp/groups/aia/documents/pdf/aiab086366.pdf). ^
19. There is, however, mention of "community centres and other buildings on Indian reserves" and "housing on Indian reserves" on LAC's website in relation to the management of maps and architectural and engineering records. Government of Canada, "Managing Cartographic, Architectural and Engineering Records in the Government of Canada," last modified October 16, 2015, http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/services/government-information-resources/information-management/Pages/managing-cartographic-records.aspx. ^
20. Government of Canada, "Engineering and Architecture Branch (architectural, technical drawings, cartographic material, graphic art) Indian reserves throughout Canada," last modified March 19, 2008, http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3677745&rec_nbr_list=3677745,2126629,2126463,2126350,1574972,203100,134285,2126320,2126810,2126800. ^
21. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 33-34. ^
22. National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, "Our Mandate," accessed December 22, 2015, http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7. ^
23. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4. ^

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