

Qu'Appelle Indian School marks 100 years

by Gontran Laviolette, OMI

LEBRET, Sask. — The Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School hundredth anniversary was marked here by a week-long celebration which included the Sask. Indian Summer Games '84, a reunion of former students and staff members and the traditional celebrations pow-wow.

The Summer Games August 5 - 9, held on the school grounds and at Fort Qu'Appelle, recalled the proud athletic history of Q.I.R.S. students Herb Strong Eagle (1956), Georges Poitras (1957) and Art Obey (1960) who were among those who were awarded the prestigious Tom Longboat medal of highest athletic achievement in Canada. Paul Acoose also brought fame to the school for his long distance running awards.

Reunion '84 brought together hundreds of ex-pupils and staff August 9 - 10 and was high-lighted by the visit of Archbishop Halpin of Regina who celebrated Mass in Lebret Sacred Heart's Church August 10. Two former principals, Bishops Paul Piche, OMI, of Mackenzie-Fort Smith, and Omer Robidoux, OMI, of Churchill-Hudson Bay, also celebrated Jubilee Masses at Lebret August 11 and 12.

The Reunion Committee was composed of Doris Bellegarde, Anita McLeod, Madeline Dumont, Bev Poitras, Rejeanne Cote, Joanne Reilly, Leila Thomson, Walter Bellegarde and Clive Linklater.

Mary-Ann Lavallee welcomed the guests at a general assembly addressed by Clive Linklater. Old-time dances and a talent show were held in the school gymnasium.

Special thanks are expressed to the residence staff, student helpers, the bingo committee, the Standing Buffalo and the Star Blanket Bands, the Touchwood-File Hills-Qu'Appelle District Chiefs Office, and the Departments of Indian Affairs, Tourism, Regional Health and many other organizations who made the events possible. Joanne Reilly was the coordinator of the Centennial events.

A History Book, being compiled, is scheduled for publication in 1985; the Committee formed for its publication includes Mary Ann Lavallee, Madeline Dumont, Doris Bellegarde, Anita McLeod, Mohan Bakshi and Kelly Pasloski.

HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

The Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School was founded in 1884; it was one of three residential schools created by the Federal Government in order to fulfill the promises made in the Treaties with the Indians of Western Canada. Industrial schools for Indians had been successfully introduced in the United States; Bishop V. Grandin, OMI, and Father E. Lacombe, OMI, conceived a plan whereby schools would be built and financed



Fr. Joseph Hugonnard, OMI

The correct spelling is with two "n". See Gaston Carrière's "Apôtre des prairies." (Ed.)

by the government but directed by Church personnel.

Father Joseph Hugonnard, OMI, was appointed principal by Prime Minister John A. MacDonald in 1884; three Grey Nuns of Montreal were the first teachers.

From 1884 to 1887 boys only were enrolled. In 1887 accommodations were built for girl students. By 1893, 225 pupils attended. A gymnasium was added in 1894.

At the beginning Indian parents were reluctant to entrust their children to the white people; they were prejudiced against the Christian religions and the culture of the whites. Father Hugonnard patiently persuaded them and the pupils felt more and more at home in "their" school. The program of studies was oriented towards christianity and the pupils enjoyed manual work, art, singing and music and various sporting activities.

The school made steady progress and the Indian parents gradually realized that all of what their children were getting from it was good.

The Industrial School provided a curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, geography, history, music, singing and drawing. The Industrial courses for boys emphasized animal husbandry and farm related subjects, with additional training in tailoring, shoemaking, printing and painting.

For the girls, homemaking skills such as spinning, weaving, baking, cooking and sewing were stressed. The students spent half of their class time on vocational training and half



Fr. O. Robidoux, OMI, with a High School graduation class.

in academic, alternating on a weekly, daily or half-daily basis. They also did housekeeping and farm chores.

Destroyed by fire January 4, 1904 the school continued in temporary quarters in the village of Lebret while it was being re-built.

Father Hugonnard continued to be devoted to his pupils until 1917 when he died on February 11. He had been to the service of Indians of the Qu'Appelle Valley for thirty-eight years, of which he had spent thirty-one years as principal of the School. He had paved the way for his successors who walked in his foot-steps. A bronze statue was erected on the school grounds in 1926, to perpetuate his memory. Frs. Pierre LeCoq, P. Magnan, A. Dugas and W. Vezina served as interim principals until Fr. Joseph Leonard, OMI, was appointed in 1919.

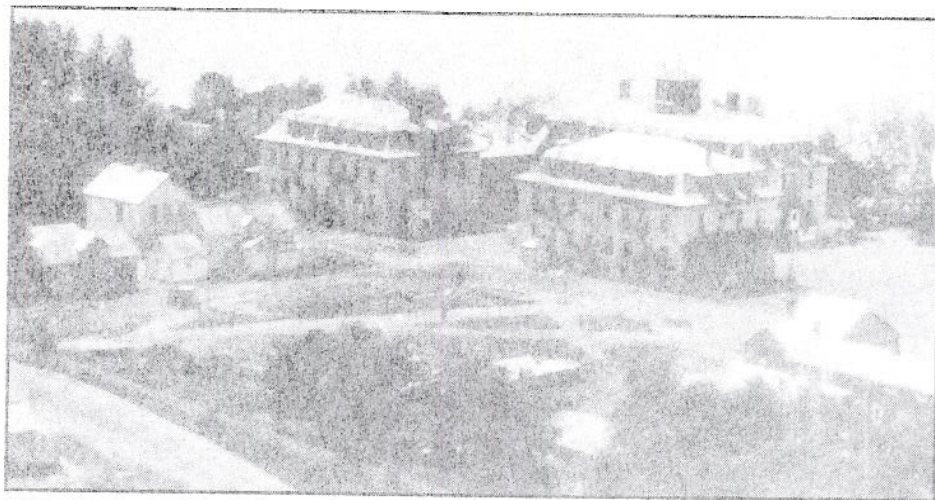
Education progressed as the Indians had found the school entirely dedicated to the welfare of the younger generations. When the first students had become parents they did not hesitate to send their children to Lebret, knowing well it was the best place to have them educated. As the children progressed in the English language the program of studies became more academic until the Saskatchewan school curriculum came into use, along with the teaching of various trades, farming and home economics.

Fr. Hugonnard recruited students mainly in the File Hills-Qu'Appelle districts in southeastern Saskatchewan. Before he died he also had re-



Lavolette photo

Monument to Fr. Hugonnard,
erected in 1926.



The school, rebuilt in 1903, was burned again in 1932. It was replaced by the present building in 1935.

cruited Catholic children from the Oak River and Oak Lake Sioux reserves in southwestern Manitoba. As the years went by students from other reserves in southern Manitoba were also registered at the school.

During Fr. Leonard's principalship in 1932, a second fire reduced the whole school to smoking ruins. The boys found hospitality at the Oblate Scholasticate and the girls, once again, in the village of Lebret. After three years a fire-proof building was erected to accommodate 300 students.

On July 1, 1936, Fr. Maurice de Bretagne, OMI, succeeded Father Leonard and served until August 1943. Fr. de Bretagne re-organized the school program, the farm operations, the manual training facilities and he encouraged the students to continue into High School. He also enlisted the missionaries to the surrounding reserves to assist in the recruiting of new students and in sharing the students' religious and moral education. He also obtained funds to permit a creation of a 24-piece military band which won many prizes in provincial festivals.

Fr. Paul Piche, OMI, was principal from August 1943 to May 1951. He opened High School classes at the school in 1948, and in 1951 a secondary school was organized and called St. Paul's High. This High School was accredited by the Saskatchewan Department of Education and, as the years progressed, 175 High School students were registered in one term. Fr. Piche also organized a Cadet Corps in 1944.

Fr. Omer Robidoux, OMI, was principal from 1951 to 1958. He taught mathematics, promoted educational standards specially at the High School level, and all forms of sports.

In 1952 an 800-seat auditorium was erected.

Fr. Victor Bilodeau, OMI, was principal from 1958 to 1964. Appointed principal in 1964, Fr. Leonard Charon, OMI, was to serve until 1974. While he took his Master's degree in education (Sept. 1968 to Sept. 1969), Fr. Julien Morin, OMI, was acting-principal.

In 1965 the Indian Affairs Department turned over the education of Indians to the Saskatchewan Provincial Government and began to phase out St. Paul's High School. An al-Indian advisory council was formed to take over the administration of the school in 1969 and of the residence in 1973.

Credit and praise are due to the Grey Nuns of Montreal who served faithfully at Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School from 1844 to 1973. Among them was Sister Helen Greyeyes, S.G.M., a Cree, daughter of a former student of the school. She dedicated forty years of her religious life to the students at Lebret. Without the dedication of the Grey Nuns the school could never have achieved its present day fame.

The Indians themselves took complete control of education and of the residence, September 13, 1981. A Council comprised of thirteen members, representing twenty-four bands in the Yorkton, Touchwood, File Hills, Qu'Appelle districts became responsible for the whole institution.

Q.I.R.S. has made more progress since then. The Council hires provincially accredited teachers and follows the Department of Education, Province of Saskatchewan curriculum. The program is appraised by the Regional Director. Every effort is made to enrich the curriculum with native contents. □