



A Word about Residential Schools

Published on July 2nd, 2021

Like many of you, it is with great sadness that the staff of the Centre du patrimoine and the board of directors of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (SHSB) have learned that numerous unmarked graves have been identified at former residential school sites in Kamloops and Cranbrook, British Columbia and Marieval, Saskatchewan. This somber news reminds us of the suffering imposed on students who attended residential schools and of their ongoing legacy for survivors and their families.

In light of this recent news, several individuals and media representatives are turning to the Centre du patrimoine (Centre) for access to archival records related to residential schools and student deaths. The Centre is a community-based, not-for-profit organization with a small staff. It is governed by an independent board of directors and its mandate is focused on the preservation of Francophone and Métis heritage in Western Canada, particularly in Manitoba.

Religious orders have either deposited or donated about a quarter of the archival records stored at the Centre to ensure their long-term preservation. Among others, the records that were created by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) in certain regions of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and northwestern Ontario are preserved at the Centre. They include more than 175 linear metres of archival material covering various aspects of their activities in Western Canada. Some information on residential schools can be found in these incomplete fonds, which have been placed in storage at the Centre. The archives in question still belong to the OMI, who have control of them. They are not fully processed, described or entered into a searchable database. Approximately half of the textual records are written in French.

Although the fonds does not include official reports or student files, some related files contain information about students. Records from 1930 and earlier are unrestricted and can be accessed at the Centre by appointment; however, the Centre must comply with public health orders, and its limited human resources may result in delays responding to requests for access. At this time, special authorization from the OMI is required to access post-1930 records. The Centre can provide researchers with contact information of an OMI representative to request this permission.

The staff of the Centre is committed to doing everything possible, in collaboration with the OMI (and other religious orders where applicable), to provide efficient, timely and safe access to anyone who wishes to consult its archives. . We are currently in discussions with the OMI to facilitate access to their archives.

Survivors and families seeking information about missing loved ones are encouraged to first check the National Student Memorial Register on the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) website. The NCTR has already compiled searchable lists of known student deaths with copies of corresponding archival records. Additionally, some information on residential schools managed by the OMI, such as photos, archival record descriptions and oral narratives, is also available online in our archival database at <https://archivesshsb.mb.ca/en>.

The SHSB acknowledges that it operates on Treaty 1 territory and on the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. The board of directors of the SHSB and the staff of the Centre du patrimoine respect the treaties that were concluded regarding these territories, they acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past, and they dedicate themselves to move forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

For more information, please contact:

Janet La France, Director General
204-233-4888