

# The TRC, Reconciliation, and the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School

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## The TRC, Reconciliation, and the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School

IN 2015 THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC) released its final report, drawing Canadians' attention to "the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools." Its 94 Calls to Action outlined wide-ranging initiatives to dismantle the enduring colonial attitudes and structures that gave rise to, and sustained, residential schools. In keeping with Eva Mackey's belief that academics are positioned to help "make things right," many regional scholars, both as educators and as members of a profession that has long reified white privilege and colonialism, have committed to the reconciliatory work of the Calls to Action.<sup>1</sup> In some ways, these efforts have resulted in observable, if modest, changes: increasing numbers of university courses have been amended to highlight Indigenous histories and explore colonialism, inherent biases of familiar texts and narratives have been reconsidered, and pedagogical practices that reinforce structural privileging of non-Indigenous students and that disadvantage Indigenous ones are being questioned. The symbolic gesture of acknowledging that Atlantic Canada is unceded Indigenous territory has become commonplace and, significantly, some regional scholars – before and since the TRC – have applied their expertise to legal cases, some resulting in important rulings affirming treaty and Indigenous rights.<sup>2</sup>

Eight years on, however, reconciliation faces sharp critiques, both as a concept that is arguably reduced to platitudes and as a process that has been so abysmally slow that, at its current pace according to one study, all of the Calls to Action will not be met until 2057.<sup>3</sup> The shortcomings of reconciliation are apparent regionally. That a settler scholar is exploring this topic for this

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1 Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 23.

2 See John G. Reid, William C. Wicken, Stephen E. Patterson, and D.G. Bell, "History, Native Issues, and the Courts: A Forum," *Acadiensis* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 3-26.

3 Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby, "Calls to Action Accountability: A Status Update on Reconciliation," Indian Department Briefs, Yellowhead Institute, 17 December 2019,

Martha Walls, "The TRC, Reconciliation, and the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School," *Acadiensis* 50, no. 2 (Autumn/automne 2021): 72-84.

anniversary issue of *Acadiensis* underscores the extent to which the field of Atlantic Canadian history remains dominated by non-Indigenous academics. Moreover, the “complex history” of residential schools in Atlantic Canada remains largely unexplored as scholars working regionally have grappled to only a slight extent with either residential schooling as it operated in this region or with the wider consequences of this scholarly inattention. The neglect of regional residential school history manifests in gaps in university curricula (which filter down to the secondary school level by virtue of teacher-education in universities),<sup>4</sup> undermines public knowledge, and impedes the building of new relationships with Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik students and communities that continue to experience the ramifications of residential schooling. The marking of the 50th anniversary of *Acadiensis* is an apt – if overdue – time for both the difficult reckoning with a collective professional shortcoming around residential schooling in the Maritime Provinces and for suggesting ways that such work might be accomplished.

In the Maritime Provinces, the “complex truth” about residential schools rests in the history of the region’s only formal residential facility located at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. Funded as all such facilities were by the federal government, the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School (SIRS) operated from 1929 until 1967 under Roman Catholic management and was staffed by the Sisters of Charity, who were headquartered at Mount Saint Vincent College in Halifax, Nova Scotia (and who were also engaged at the Kootenay Residential School in Cranbrook, British Columbia). Founded more than two decades after Peter Henderson Bryce’s damning 1907 critique of residential schools as unsafe and ill-conceived,<sup>5</sup> the Shubenacadie facility was part of a “second wave” of residential schools that emerged in the early 20th century. This second wave followed the First World War, as the growing rights-centred activism of Indigenous peoples was seen by the federal Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) as a threat to its assimilatory mandate. This second round of residential school construction was part of a spate of new and repressive federal policies, among them an Indian Act amendment that made attendance at school mandatory for Indigenous children – aimed at both curtailing Indigenous

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4 Call to Action 62 (ii) emphasizes the importance of government funding of survivor- and community-informed teacher education around residential schooling.

5 Travis Hay, Cindy Blackstock, and Michael Kirlew, “Dr. Peter Bryce (1853–1932): Whistleblower on Residential Schools,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 192, no. 9 (March 2020): E223–4.

peoples' quests for rights and at strengthening assimilation.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of the Shubenacadie facility fulfilled the personal commitment of DIA Deputy Superintendent General Duncan Campbell Scott to the creation of a residential school system that stretched from coast to coast (to coast).<sup>7</sup> Each year, for 37 years, 125 to 175 children attended the Shubenacadie institution. Ronald Niezen suggests that SIRS was one of the most violent in the nation, noting that based on "the many narratives given to the national events of the [Truth and Reconciliation] Commission it becomes clear that there are some schools being mentioned more often in association with experiences of abuse: Shubenacadie in Nova Scotia . . . [comes] instantly to mind."<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that SIRS shaped in profoundly negative ways the lives of Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik over generations, few regional scholars have studied the institution or assessed its wider influence on the region and its peoples.

The silence of regional scholars around the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School is particularly striking given that even from its early years *Acadiensis* has featured Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqiyik histories. This trend is confirmed by John Matchim's recent bibliography within the journal, which in 42 pages identifies wide-ranging regional scholarship around Indigenous peoples and Atlantic Canadian history but, notably, cites just three sources that pertain directly to the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School.<sup>9</sup> Given the dearth of

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6 For more on SIRS as part of this second wave, see Karen Bridget Murray, "The Violence Within: Canadian Modern Statehood and the Pan-territorial Residential School System Ideal," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 3 (September 2017): 747-72.

7 Chris Benjamin, *Indian School Road: Legacies of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School* (Halifax: Nimbus Press, 2014), 35.

8 Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 26.

9 John R.H. Matchim, "A Bibliography on Indigenous Peoples and the History of the Atlantic Region," *Acadiensis* 49, no. 2 (Autumn 2020): 223-64. The three sources that engage directly with SIRS are Chris Benjamin, *Indian School Road*, Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children and the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, 4th ed. (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), and Martha Walls "'Part of That Whole System': Maritime Day and Residential Schooling and Federal Culpability," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 30, no. 2 (2010): 361-85. J.R. Miller's *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and John Milloy's *A National Crime: A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1999) are national histories of residential schools that include references to Shubenacadie. A recent review essay by Mercedes Peters similarly highlights newer scholarship by regional scholars who "as of late . . . have begun to structure narratives that acknowledge Mi'kmaw places, using Mi'kmaw names and understandings of territory," and that constitutes a simple gesture that "drastically changes the stories historians are able to tell and, along with that, shifts our understanding of relationships between Mi'kmaq and colonial settlers"; see Mercedes Peters, "The Future is Mi'kmaq:

published work on SIRS, it is somewhat ironic that the first *Acadiensis* article to feature Indigenous history (published in the journal's second volume) was Judith Fingard's 1972 "The New England Company and the New Brunswick Indians, 1786-1826: A Comment on the Colonial Perversion of British Benevolence." This piece, which explores the Sussex Vale school's removal of Indigenous children from their communities in a "civilizing" scheme, is now read as part of the wider historiography around residential schools<sup>10</sup> though it would be decades before linkages between it and the federal institutions were made, with the TRC report itself making one of the earliest connections.<sup>11</sup> While Fingard's article is emblematic of the journal's commitment to regional Indigenous history (which is too extensive to be detailed here), it also illustrates the journal's persistent focus upon the pre-Confederation – and pre-residential school – era.<sup>12</sup> While regional historians may have been inclined to consider as "national" the post-Confederation histories of Indigenous peoples whose lives were subjected in specific ways to federal legislation and oversight, and thus perhaps out of place in a regional journal, one result has been an enduring and unfortunate lack of attention by regional scholars to the Shubenacadie institution.<sup>13</sup>

In light of academic inattention to SIRS, it was survivors of the institution who first shared its history. The field of Atlantic Canadian history owes a tremendous debt to men and women who were not only willing to recount

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Exploring the Merits of Nation-Based Histories as the Future of Indigenous History in Canada," *Acadiensis* 48, no. 2 (Autumn 2019): 206-16.

- 10 Judith Fingard, "The New England Company and the New Brunswick Indians, 1786-1826: A Comment on the Colonial Perversion of British Benevolence," *Acadiensis* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 29-42.
- 11 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "What we Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation" (Library and Archives Canada, 2015), 21, IR4-6-2015-eng.pdf (publications.gc.ca).
- 12 This focus is illustrated by a spate of 1970s *Acadiensis* articles by L.F.S. Upton, which considered "Indian" policy in each of the Maritime colonies; see Upton, "Indian Affairs in Colonial New Brunswick," *Acadiensis* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 3-26; Upton, "Indian Policy in Colonial Nova Scotia 1783-1871," *Acadiensis* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 3-31; and Upton, "The Micmacs in Colonial Prince Edward Island," *Acadiensis* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 21-42. This focus continues, and is illustrated by the two *Acadiensis* articles that won the Canadian Historical Association's Indigenous History Group's Best Article Prize being firmly rooted in the pre-Confederation era: Jason Hall, "Maliseet Cultivation and Climatic Resilience on the Welastekw/St. John River During the Little Ice Age," *Acadiensis* 44, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2015): 3-25 and Micah Pawling, "Welastekwey (Maliseet) Homeland: Waterscapes and Continuity within the Lower St. John River Valley, 1784-1900," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2017): 5-34.
- 13 Martha Walls, "Confederation and Maritime First Nations," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2017): 155-76.

their personal, often traumatic, residential school experiences publicly, but who did so despite herculean efforts to quiet and discredit their accounts. In the 1970s, the decade following the 1967 closure of the Shubenacadie institution, survivors began to speak publicly of their experiences. And in June 1978, an appeal went out to readers of the Mi'kmaw newspaper *Micmac News* to "reveal your experiences at the [Shubenacadie Indian Residential] School" for a series to appear in the paper.<sup>14</sup> That summer, the stories of 30 residential school "veterans" recounted horrific experiences at Shubenacadie in a two-part series edited by W. Paul Conrad. Although the project was initially supported by the Sisters of Charity, the completed article was denounced by the Sisters for "fail[ing] to represent the work of the order" and, as a result, the printer of the *Micmac News*, Dartmouth Free Press, refused to run the story. Conrad, however, secured a new printer and later published the survivors' accounts of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School.<sup>15</sup> The denunciation of Conrad's articles by the Sisters of Charity fed denial and doubt over the veracity of survivor accounts of the Shubenacadie institution. Survivors, nevertheless, continued to share their experiences, pushing the Shubenacadie institution into the wider regional consciousness.

In 1992, the late Isabelle Knockwood shared her experiences of 11 years spent at the Shubenacadie institution in *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children and the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*.<sup>16</sup> The importance of this first published account, which wove together Knockwood's personal stories, survivor testimonies, and previously uncited federal records, cannot be overstated; its ongoing importance is affirmed by its numerous reprints. Meanwhile, in 1995, Nora Bernard, who also endured the Shubenacadie school, launched the initial class action lawsuit against the government of Canada seeking compensation for residential school survivors. Bernard's actions precipitated a flurry of additional lawsuits that

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14 The Native Communications Society of Nova Scotia, the group that published the newspaper, solicited for the contributions in June; see "Society Starts Shubie School Series," *Micmac News* 7, no. 6 (June 1978): 5.

15 In August of 1978, the Native Communications Society of Nova Scotia reported that the "Sisters of Charity maintain a plea of innocence to the alleged child abuse depicted by the interview subjects who not only witnessed, but experienced firsthand, these acts"; see Editorial, "Series Ran into Dilem[m]a," *Micmac News* 8, no. 8 (August 1978): 18 as well as W. Paul Conrad, "Comments from the Author," *Micmac News* 7, no. 9 (September 1978): 18.

16 Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children and the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (Lockeport, NS: Roseway Publishing, 1992).

morphed into a single massive class action lawsuit that resulted in the 2007 Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that compensated up to 70,000 former residential school survivors and created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The efforts of Conrad, Knockwood, Bernard, and other survivors of the Shubenacadie facility reinforced a national survivors' movement that led directly to the TRC. They also inspired a spate of new settler scholars who, during the 1990s, were the first in the region to research the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School – though little of this work would ever be published.<sup>17</sup> As I learned then, Knockwood directly contributed to this graduate work as her research for her memoir resulted in copies of federal records pertaining to the Shubenacadie facility being made available for a time at the Nova Scotia Archives. Despite emergent academic interest in the Shubenacadie institution during the 1990s, publication around it lagged. Even as scholarship from outside the region – for example J.R. Miller's 1997 *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* and John Milloy's 1999 *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* – featured the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, the institution was not considered by published academic works of regional history.<sup>18</sup>

Scholars' reticence to take up the topic may have been influenced by gaps in sources. Despite the existence of survivor narratives and federal records, the archives of the Sisters of Charity who operated SIRS proved elusive. The Sisters of Charity have long insisted that virtually all its residential school records were lost in the 1951 blaze that destroyed the order's Motherhouse; however, this explanation does not explain the whereabouts of records pertaining to the era after 1951. At any rate, it is very likely that the litigation of the 1990s discouraged free sharing of whatever records might exist – a problem of access that continues to bedevil researchers.

While non-existent/closed church records were (and remain) an impediment to research, residential school history also became politically fraught terrain during the 1990s as it was steeped in controversy around the

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17 See for example, Briar Dawn Ransberry, "Teach Your Children Well: Curriculum and Pedagogy at the Shubenacadie Residential School, Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, 1951-1967" (MA, Dalhousie University 2000); Marilyn Elaine Thomson-Millward, "Researching the Devils : A Study of Brokerage at the Indian Residential School, Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia (PhD, Dalhousie University, 1997); and Martha Elizabeth Walls, "Native Responses to the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, 1928-1951" (MA, Dalhousie University, 1996).

18 Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*; Milloy, *National Crime*.

critical issue of who was entitled to share this history. Given the skepticism around, and suppression of, Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqiyik accounts of residential school experiences, and considering scholars' failure to draw on (and thus legitimize) accounts of former students, suspicions over the intent of non-Indigenous academics (who were affiliated with institutions linked to systems of power that perpetuated the colonialism that was central to the residential school system itself) are entirely understandable. Such concerns were exacerbated by academic works, readily picked up by public discourse, which presented residential schools as being "flawed but well intentioned," a line of assessment starkly at odds with the experiences of former students. The scholarship of Marilyn Thomson-Millward, for example, whose 1997 doctoral thesis offered a very sympathetic account of the Sisters of Charity's work at Shubenacadie,<sup>19</sup> starkly epitomized this stance in this region and it was a perspective she offered in a lengthy 1993 review of Knockwood's memoir. In a four-page rebuke of *Out of the Depths* that appeared in the *New Maritimes* in 1993, Millward not only championed the goodwill and intentions of the Sisters of Charity, she painstakingly detailed "discrepancies" in Knockwood's narrative, diminished the violences of SIRS as typical school punishment simply misunderstood as the result of "cultural differences," and, in the end, ultimately critiqued as too one-sided the dark story Knockwood chose to tell and minimized the book as one of a troubled author plagued by "demons."<sup>20</sup> Millward's review, which sparked the anger of many readers of the *New Maritimes*, reinforced perceptions of academic hostility to survivor initiatives and helped to generate a volatile and unwelcoming climate for residential school research.<sup>21</sup>

Since the 1990s, academic silence around the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School remained a hallmark of Maritime historiography. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise's edited 1993 *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, John Reid's 2009 *Nova Scotia: A Pocket History*, and the first two editions

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19 Millward, "Researching the Devils."

20 Marilyn Millward, Review of *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* by Isabelle Knockwood, *New Maritimes* 11, no. 4 (March/April 1993): 24-7. See also Marilyn Millward, "Clean Behind the Ears? Micmac Parents, Micmac Children, and the Shubenacadie Residential School," *New Maritimes* 10, no. 4 (March/April 1992): 6-15.

21 For Millward's rebuttal to critiques of her review, see Millward and Donna Smyth, "Out of the Depths: The Trial of Marilyn Millward (letters with response on Marilyn Millward's review of Isabelle Knockwood's *Out of the Depths*)," *New Maritimes* 11, no. 5 (May/June 1993): 2, 4.



of Conrad and Hiller's *Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making* (2001 and 2010) do not refer to the institution at all.<sup>22</sup> The 2015 edition of *A Region in the Making* includes a single paragraph that incorrectly identifies the Shubenacadie facility's opening year as 1923 while noting, briefly, that "its teachers tried to erase the language and traditions of young Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik, instill Christian values, and develop practical skills, but harsh discipline and underfunded facilities brought only hardship, heartache, and misery."<sup>23</sup> To this date, no published *Acadiensis* article has had as its central focus the residential school at Shubenacadie. While this may well reflect an absence or quality of submissions to the journal, it means that the flagship history journal of the Atlantic region has not contributed substantively to understanding the regional history of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School.

Recognition of a long and collective failure of regional scholars to grapple with the history and legacy of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School is not only a necessary precursor to addressing gaps in the region's historiography; it is an important step in meeting the Calls to Action of the TRC. The TRC's presentation of residential schools as being "designed and implemented in an essentially homogeneous national space" problematically obfuscates regional factors that shaped policies, student experiences, and enduring legacies of residential schools.<sup>24</sup> In this critique rests an opportunity for scholars of Atlantic Canada to understand the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in its regional social, political, and economic contexts. Indeed, in recent years, scholarship has tentatively begun to explore this regional specificity. Maura Hanrahan's 2008 article considers connections between resistance and geography, identifying how proximity shaped the ability of Mi'kmaq to resist the institution.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Karen Murray's 2017 article fits the emergence of the Shubenacadie institution into a specific regional political context by viewing it, in part, as a punitive federal response

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22 E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 1993); John Reid, *Nova Scotia: A Pocket History* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2010); Margaret Conrad and James Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001 and 2010).

23 Conrad and Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A History* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2015), 210.

24 Brian Gettler, "Historical Research at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 646.

25 Maura Hanrahan, "Resisting Colonialism in Nova Scotia: The Kesukwitk Mi'kmaq, Centralization, and Residential Schooling," *Native Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (2008): 25-44.

to the regional rights activism of Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik.<sup>26</sup> My own work has aimed to situate the Shubenacadie institution within a regional educational context that included wider networks of federal day and provincial schools.<sup>27</sup> However, there remains very much to be explored about how regional forces shaped – and were shaped by – the residential school at Shubenacadie.

A regional approach to residential school history should be guided by principles established by the TRC. First and foremost, the TRC underscores the collective obligation of scholars to engage in this work as it positions the knowing and telling of residential school history as belonging to all Canadians. The residential school at Shubenacadie was shaped by a genocidal federal agenda, but it was defined by regional social, economic, and political forces. It was animated, for instance, by the forced participation of Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqiyik communities but was also enabled by the voluntary contributions of non-Indigenous actors who directly, and as observers marked by varying degrees of complacency, endorsed its ideals and practices over time. Scholars, especially non-Indigenous scholars, must engage residential school history collaboratively with Indigenous communities, an approach at the heart of the reconciliation agenda spelled out by the Calls to Action. This is an approach that may serve as a corrective to scholars' past willingness to leave residential school history to survivors. The telling of this history also must not fall into the trap of conveying “all sides” of the residential school's history (which seems a mere variant of earlier, problematic, efforts to depict the institutions as well-intentioned but misguided). There are not “sides” to the history of the residential school at Shubenacadie – there is one extraordinary complex history that involved not just Indigenous peoples and state and ecclesiastic actors, but every single settler who resides on unceded Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqiyik territory.

The TRC's emphasis on the enduring legacies of residential schools also means that regional historiography must not be limited to the operational years of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School (1929-1967); rather, the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School should be treated both as a discrete entity but also as a lens through which to view the regional political, social, and economic factors that shaped the lived experiences of Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik both in the years before the institution's opening and in the decades since its closure. One specific way to consider this wider context

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26 Murray, “Violence Within.”

27 Walls, “Part of That Whole System.”

has clearly emerged from the debate surrounding the TRC's identification of 139 formal residential schools in Canada. TRC participants and others have emphasized that there was, in addition to the institutions identified specifically as residential schools, a network of institutions – such as orphanages, convent schools, and reformatories – that claimed Indigenous children and were connected experientially to the wider colonial agenda of residential schools. Thus, the exploration of how these institutions were part of a regional process of the state-sanctioned removal of Mi'kmaw and Wolastoqiyik children from their families in an assimilative and punitive agenda is required as part of understanding the wider “complex history” of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School. An already rich regional scholarship on these institutions might serve as grounding for studies to incorporate the specific ways in which Indigenous children and their communities were uniquely part of their mandates.

Residential schools were also collaborative ventures that involved institutions of higher learning. Ian Mosby's study of the “unprecedented series of nutritional studies of First Nations communities and Indian residential schools [including Shubenacadie] by some of Canada's leading nutrition experts in cooperation with Indian Affairs” reveals how, nationally, university researchers were culpable in the problematic mission of residential schools.<sup>28</sup> To what extent did Atlantic Canadian universities endorse and support the work of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School through research, teacher training, or in other capacities? Mount Saint Vincent University acknowledges its “connection to residential schools through our founders, the Sisters of Charity Halifax,”<sup>29</sup> but to date the precise nature of these connections, and the extent to which this and other regional universities contributed to and justified the mandate of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, have not been explored.<sup>30</sup> While two Canadian universities have identified and apologized for their roles in perpetuating residential schools, none have, to date, been as forthcoming in this region.<sup>31</sup>

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28 Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, no. 91 (May 2013): 147.

29 Mount Saint Vincent University, “A Message from the Interim President on the Cowessess First Nation Tragedy,” 25 June 2021, <https://www.msvu.ca/a-message-from-the-interim-president-on-the-cowessess-first-nation-tragedy/>.

30 Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science.”

31 In 2011, the University of Manitoba apologized for its role in educating people who operated residential schools; see “University of Manitoba Statement of Apology and

The history of SIRS is also part of a wider regional web of education that included (as noted above) federal day schools on reserves and provincial public schools. Myriad shortcomings of the federal day schools led to children being placed at SIRS for want of educational opportunity. Such was the case, for example, with the 20 Mi'kmaq children from PEI who in the fall of 1945 were sent to Shubenacadie because there was "no accommodation for them" at the local federal day school.<sup>32</sup> The connection between provincial schools and SIRS also remains unexplored. The Shubenacadie institution was theoretically required to follow provincial curricula, but how was this compliance ensured and by whom? Also, how did the exclusionary practices of public schools shape the educational opportunities of Indigenous children? This is a particularly salient point given that the SIRS curriculum, like that of all residential schools, ended at eighth grade (though few children reached that upper grade level). Indigenous children's access to education beyond Grade 8 demanded the collaboration of public schools in the region; how did provincial school policy and practices, for instance, stymie or shape older Indigenous children's opportunities for education in this region?

Finally, as noted above, survivors of residential schooling in this region have been at the forefront of educating Canadians around residential schools and, significantly, in marshalling the legal campaign that led, ultimately, to the TRC itself. Recognition of their difficult work and persistence in this advocacy – and efforts to suppress it – is also long overdue and is part of the wider and complex regional history of residential schools. These brief observations about possible future directions in the creation of a robust new and reconciliatory historiography are by no means exhaustive. However, given that *Acadiensis* is currently marking its 50th year, it is evident that the time is right for a renewed scholarly commitment to the history of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School.

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Reconciliation to Indian Residential School Survivors," <https://umanitoba.ca/about/media/StatementOfApology.pdf>. In 2018 the University of British Columbia, recognizing "how little our institution and others like it did to understand what was happening, speak against it, or to teach in response to it," apologized for "the role this university played in perpetuating [the residential school] system"; see CBC, "'Failing to Confront a Heinous History': UBC Apologizes to Victims of Residential Schools," 10 April 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ubc-residential-school-apology-1.4612150> as well as University of British Columbia, *UBC News*, 10 April 2018, <https://news.ubc.ca/2018/04/09/ubc-offers-statement-of-apology-related-to-indian-residential-school-system/>.

32 Agent J.E. Daly, Quarterly Report Ending September 30, 1945, RG 10, vol. 6059, file 270-1, part 2, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

In the spring of 2021, the horrific confirmation of children's remains at various residential school sites was met by widespread shock by many in Canada; this shock, however, was not shared by Indigenous peoples who, for decades, have insisted that many students of residential schools were unaccounted for, their fates unknown, and their graves unmarked. Indeed, this was an issue addressed head-on by the TRC as Calls to Action 71-75 revolve around the location of burial records and sites and demand the return of children's remains to their families and communities. The discrepancy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people's responses to the recent discoveries of unmarked graves speaks to the extent to which the full history of residential schools remains unknown by many Canadians – and underscores the critical importance of it in all regions of Canada. Current conversations sparked by the horrific discoveries of gravesites and by the creation in this region of a national historic site at the former location of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, may serve as a catalyst to the work of scholars in the region and signal a turning point in a region-centred understanding of “the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools.”<sup>33</sup>

**Postscript:** On 20 October 2021, Dr. Ramona Lumpkin, interim president and vice-chancellor of Mount Saint Vincent University, apologized on behalf of the university for its involvement in residential schooling. Noting that “The Sisters of Charity Halifax, the founders and previous owners of Mount Saint Vincent University, had members who staffed the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Nova Scotia, which was open from 1930 to 1967, and the Cranbrook Residential School in British Columbia, which was open from 1890 to 1970,” Lumpkin stated “Mount Saint Vincent University is deeply sorry for our role in the tragedy of residential schools in Canada.” The full apology can be read at <https://www.msvu.ca/about-msvu/indigenous-initiatives/apology-and-commitment-to-indigenous-peoples/>.

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33 Government of Canada, “Government of Canada Recognizes the National Historic Significance of the Residential School System and Former Residential School Sites,” 1 September 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2020/09/government-of-canada-recognizes-the-national-historic-significance-of-the-residential-school-system-and-former-residential-school-sites.html>.

**MARTHA WALLS** enseigne l'histoire à l'Université Mount Saint Vincent d'Halifax. Son projet de recherche actuel explore comment les efforts déployés par le service de l'Extension de l'enseignement de l'Université Saint Francis Xavier dans les collectivités mi'kmaq du Nord-Est de la Nouvelle-Écosse de 1957 à 1970 ont été accueillis et rejetés par les hommes et les femmes mi'kmaq, qui avaient leurs propres priorités sociales, économiques et politiques.

**MARTHA WALLS** teaches history at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. Her current research project explores how the efforts of the Saint Francis Xavier University's Extension Department to foster "community development" within northeastern Nova Scotian Mi'kmaw communities from 1957-1970 was met and resisted by Mi'kmaq men and women, who had their own social, economic, and political agendas.