

11 Restricted Indians from leaving their reserve without permission from an Indian agent

1885 TO 1951 (NOT LEGISLATED BUT A POLICY CREATED IN 1885 AND ABANDONED IN 1951)

No rebel Indians should be allowed off the Reserves without a pass signed by an I.D. official. The dangers of complications with white men will thus be lessened and by preserving a knowledge of individual movements any inclination to petty depredations may be checked by the facility of apprehending those who commit such offences.

HAYTER REED, *Assistant Indian Commissioner, 1885*⁹

The Red River Rebellion (1869 to 1870) made it more challenging to encourage settlers to move to Saskatchewan, as they had concerns for their safety. The outbreak of the North-West Rebellion (1885) exacerbated those concerns. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, keen to develop the agricultural potential of the West, needed a means of allaying the settlers' fears and inhibiting the ability of Indians to congregate. Despite the lack of a legal basis for restricting the movement of Indians, the prime minister readily endorsed the concept of a pass system when it was brought to his attention. Notices were posted on Treaty 6 reserves warning all Indians against leaving their reserves.

While it was never written into the *Indian Act* and the prime minister acknowledged that the legal ability to enforce it did not exist, the pass system was used effectively by Indian agents to control the movements of Indians. "In some cases, rations and other 'privileges'

were withheld from those who refused to comply with pass regulations, but the most effective approach was to have the police arrest those found off the reserve without passes and, where possible, prosecute them either for trespass under the Indian Act or for vagrancy under the criminal code."¹⁰

A permit to pass included the time an individual was allowed to be off reserve, the purpose of the time away, and whether or not the individual was allowed to carry a gun. Indian agents knew well the attitudes and characters of all those who fell under their jurisdictions so could decline a request for a pass if they considered the applicant a potential threat. The pass system was initially used to control those who had participated in the Red River Rebellion but later expanded to apply to all Indians, although history suggests the permit-to-pass system was primarily administered in the Prairies.

In order to obtain a permit to pass, Indians would occasionally have to travel many days by foot to the Indian agent's house, not knowing if he would be there when they arrived. If the agent was away, they would either have to camp and wait, or return home. The pass system was also a means of maintaining a separation between Indians and the European farmers, which seems illogical considering the government's goal of assimilation—it's hard to achieve assimilation if the target population is isolated on reserves. The pass system restricted Indians' access to local towns in order to prevent Indian farmers from wasting their time when they should be tending their crops, which they were restricted from selling. The pass system additionally supported the government's

attempts to quash potlatches, the Sun Dance, and other cultural practices.

Beginning in 1889, parents required passes to visit their children interned at residential schools. Controlling parents' access to their children aided and abetted the government's policy of keeping the family and their influence distanced from their children. Agents were encouraged to only provide a pass to parents to visit their children in school no more frequently than four times a year. If a child was ill, and the residential school shared this information with the child's parents, additional passes might be issued.

12 Created residential schools

1886 TO 1996 (FIRST DISCUSSED IN 1840S: LAST SCHOOL CLOSED IN 1996)

The Governor in Council may make regulations, which shall have the force of law, for the committal by justices or Indian agents of children of Indian blood under the age of sixteen years, to such industrial school or boarding school, there to be kept, cared for and educated for a period not extending beyond the time at which such children shall reach the age of eighteen years.

*Indian Act, 1884*¹¹

And so it began: the most aggressive and destructive of all *Indian Act* policies. When the federal government signed the 11 numbered treaties starting in 1871, it assumed responsibility for the education of the Indians of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, as well as portions

of Ontario, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. Indian signatories to the treaties realized that life as they knew it was seriously impacted by the influx of Europeans, and they wanted the children to have an education so they could take part in the new wage economy. They did not envision what lay ahead for their children at residential schools. How could they?

Residential schools brought immeasurable human suffering to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, the effects of which continue to reverberate through generations of families and many communities. Other policies were harsh but could be worked around. The government banned the potlatch, so practitioners went underground to continue to hold ceremonies; the government pushed people onto small reserves but they still were with their families. But when the government took the children from their families, it was unbearable.

The goal of the schools was to "kill the Indian in the child,"¹² but tragically it was the children themselves who died in overwhelming numbers at these schools. It is estimated that 6,000 of the 150,000 children who attended the schools between the 1870s and 1996 either died or disappeared. The numbers are not precise because no one kept accurate records: not the schools, the churches that managed the schools, or the Indian agents. Children died at the schools from disease, malnourishment, and broken hearts. Many children who escaped from their residential school died on the journey to their home community.

The government did not have a clear policy on discipline, which frequently was in the form of beating and whipping, in the schools, and discipline was arbitrary and