

Resource Guide

for researching and recognizing
residential school sites



Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women

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Alberta 

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Research | 4 |
| Location, Research and Recognition Support | 5 |
| Archaeological Information | 6 |
| Designated Historic Places | 7 |
| Provincial Archives of Alberta | 8 |
| Royal Alberta Museum | 9 |
| Recognition | 9 |
| Provincial Historic Resource Designations | 10 |
| Grants | 11 |
| Grants to Help With Research..... | 11 |
| Grants to Help With Recognition..... | 12 |
| Resources | 13 |
| Contact Info | 13 |

*Conducting research about or recognizing residential school history can be a painful process. If reading this guide is causing pain or bringing back distressing memories, please call the Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line at **1-866-925-4419**. The Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day and can also provide information on other health supports provided by the [Health Canada Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program](#).*

Introduction

Between 1893 and 1996, more than 134 residential schools operated in Canada supported by the federal government and often run by churches and missionary organizations.

Approximately 150,000 Indigenous children in Canada attended residential schools. These schools were established to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture. Underfunded, located in remote places far away from children's home communities, and lacking proper oversight, the schools were plagued by disease, dubious educational outcomes and physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement recognized 25 residential school locations in Alberta, in addition to several other schools not included in the settlement.

This guide is an overview to the various programs and services available from the Alberta government to help interested researchers, former students, Survivors, Survivor groups or communities research and/or recognize residential school sites in Alberta.

Research

There are a number of programs and services the Alberta government offers that can help you learn about residential school sites, including:

- Research, recognition and location support
- Archaeological information
- Access to archival and other records on residential schools and associated cemeteries
- Curated exhibits at the Royal Alberta Museum
- Access to grants to help with your research



*Sacred Heart Indian Residential School, Brocket, Alberta, Peigan Reserve 1943-46
(Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1973.0248/848)*

Location, Research and Recognition Support

As part of the Heritage Division in Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, the Aboriginal Heritage Section is your first point of contact for all inquiries relating to residential school locations, research or recognition. Staff work with Indigenous communities to help preserve and protect cultural heritage sites, including residential school locations and unregistered gravesites, burials and cemeteries.

Currently, there are 25 residential schools in Alberta named in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, in addition to several other schools not included in the settlement. Using community knowledge, archival material, archaeological data and site visits, the exact locational information (GPS waypoints) is available for the majority of residential school locations in Alberta. For locations that have not been field-verified or where exact coordinates are not confirmed, a general proximity is known.

Each residential school location has been given a level of protection under the [Historical Resources Act](#) and is included on the [Listing of Historic Resources](#). This listing is a tool that developers, industry representatives and regulators may use to help determine if a proposed development might affect historic resources. It can also provide advance notification of possible historic resource concerns.

As with other Indigenous cultural heritage sites, the exact location, site type or affiliated Indigenous community is never disclosed on the public version of the Listing, as many of the places recorded are sensitive or sacred.

The Aboriginal Heritage Section can assist with the first steps of residential school research, including map production and review, facilitation of Elder interviews and conducting site visits with communities. We are the liaison between communities or researchers and the archaeologists, grant administrators, archivists and museum staff who can assist you. For more information and to get started, please contact the [Aboriginal Heritage Section](#).

Archaeological Information

The Alberta government is responsible for identifying and protecting [archaeological sites](#) in the province. Some residential schools or former residential school locations are recorded as archaeological sites. Archaeological site records include the location of sites and evidence of any features (i.e., structures, foundations, historic debris, etc.).

All archaeological forms and reports contain sensitive information about historical resources. Such documents are usually not shared without permission from the appropriate government department. If you or your community would like to request copies of these documents, please [contact us](#) to start the process.

We know that residential school Survivors, communities and allies are concerned about the possibility of unmarked burials or graves located outside of present-day cemetery fence lines that include the remains of the many Indigenous children who never returned home.

Careful archaeological investigation using ground-penetrating radar can be one potential way to find burial locations. The radar transmits electromagnetic energy into the ground to detect variations in the soil that can suggest evidence of soil excavation or the presence of a coffin.

All of these investigations in Alberta must be conducted by qualified and approved professionals and under a [valid permit](#).

Designated Historic Places

Provincial Historic Resource sites are searchable on the [Alberta Register of Historic Places](#), a listing of historic resources designated under the province's *Historical Resources Act*. Some residential school buildings and sites in Alberta have already been designated as [Provincial Historic Resources](#). In other cases, residential schools formed part of larger mission sites in which associated buildings (churches, homes, etc.) have been designated.

The Alberta Register of Historic Places generally contains information like the site name, location, historical information and the Statement of Significance (a summary of the historic value of a heritage place). You may notice that there is less information available for residential schools than other types of designated places. However, Statements of Significance will be uploaded to the Register as they are completed.

Another tool to help with your residential school research is the [Alberta Heritage Survey](#). Its main function is to oversee a collection of information, including photographs, relating to heritage resources across the province.

With data from many sources, the format, style and content of the records available through the Alberta Heritage Survey vary greatly. However, the majority of residential school sites in Alberta have one or more associated Heritage Survey file numbers. The information accessible online may also not be the full extent of hard copy information available. If you or your community have inquiries about a specific school or Heritage Survey file, please [contact us](#).

The Alberta government also has an internal repository of records dating back several decades, with some records relating to residential schools. In some instances, these include photo documentation, building evaluation and feasibility studies, or materials provided by external stakeholders as part of proposals for site rehabilitation and reuse. The types and breadth of information available is not consistent from site to site, nor is it publically accessible or digitized online. If you are researching a specific residential school and want to know if non-digitized information is available, please [contact us](#).



Blue Quills School, St. Paul, Alberta, no date (Provincial Archives of Alberta, OB39376)

Provincial Archives of Alberta

[The Provincial Archives of Alberta \(PAA\)](#) acquires, preserves and makes available private and government records related to the province, and serves as the permanent archival repository of the Alberta government. Church and related records (Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Anglican, United Church/Methodist) for some Alberta residential schools are available to the public at the PAA, though these are primarily administrative records. Record examples include quarterly returns, admission applications, principal reports, inspection reports, and newsletters or yearbooks.

Archival records are arranged by creator rather than by subject. This means records about a single individual or community are often filed in many different sources at the PAA. This can sometimes make research challenging and, for this reason, there are staff who work directly with the public to develop strategies on how to find relevant archival records. Please contact the PAA in advance of your visit to get your research started: 780-427-1056 or paa@gov.ab.ca.

It is important to understand that archival records are not available online and cannot leave the PAA. To access these archival records, you must visit in person.

Royal Alberta Museum

The Royal Alberta Museum in downtown Edmonton is a museum of human and natural history with a mandate to collect, preserve, research and display objects related to Alberta's cultural and natural heritage. The museum's Indigenous Studies program, one of 13 curatorial programs at the museum, cares for approximately 18,000 objects of cultural and historic value created by Indigenous peoples. The collection holds great meaning for originating communities, and program staff work with cultural knowledge holders to make sure that the collection is cared for in a culturally sensitive and respectful way. The collection's areas of greatest strength are:

- Niitsitapi (Blackfoot)
- Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree)
- Dene
- Métis

The collection includes a small number of objects made by students in residential schools.

The museum's Human History hall features a display, "Acknowledging the History of Residential Schools in Alberta", guest-curated by an Indigenous artist whose family includes residential school Survivors. The display considers the history of residential schools in Alberta and addresses their continuing impacts on Survivors, families and communities. A large wall map shows the location of all known residential schools in Alberta with their dates of operation, and a digital media installation presents archival photos from many of these schools.

Admission to the museum is free for Indigenous peoples.

Recognition

There are a number of programs and services the Alberta government offers that can help you protect and recognize a residential school location, including Provincial Historic Resource designation.

Provincial Historic Resource Designations

The *Historical Resources Act* empowers the delegated Minister to designate and protect Provincial Historic Resources. Designation can be a tool for recognizing the significance of a historic place and protecting it appropriately. Residential schools are a highly important part of the history of Alberta and are eligible for provincial designation.

It is important to note that the *Historical Resources Act* legislation does not have jurisdiction on federal lands, including reserve lands. Many of the residential schools in Alberta were located on reserve. If a community would like to protect a residential school located on reserve, it may wish to do so through a Band Council Resolution. Staff will work with community officials to arrange for the site to be included on the Alberta Register of Historic Places, which will make the site eligible for conservation grants through Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. For more information about the designation program, including eligibility and the application process, visit [their website](#).



St. Mary's R.C. School, 1936 (Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1973.0248/874a)



Crowfoot Indian School with addition, 1938 (Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1973.0248/874a)

Grants

There are grants available through Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women that can assist you with research or recognition of a residential school site.

Grants to Help With Research

One of the main ways the Alberta government supports heritage is [through grants](#) to organizations, community groups and individuals. These grants help to promote public awareness and enjoyment of Alberta's heritage.

Grants are available for research projects that produce new understanding or add to the knowledge base of Alberta's history. Eligible projects can include research on Alberta heritage topics, oral histories, building surveys and inventories or heritage management plans. With respect to residential schools, eligible expenses for grant funding consideration include archival research, Elder interviews and/or site visits. Matching grants are awarded up to 50 per cent of the eligible project value to a maximum of \$25,000.

The annual application deadline is the first working day of February. Funding decisions are released in April or May. For more information, please contact the [grant program coordinator](#).

Grants to Help With Recognition

As mentioned earlier, grants to support heritage research efforts are available. There are also grants to help with the preservation of historic places or to raise awareness of residential school history in Alberta.

Historic Resource Conservation Grants

Conservation grants provide matching grants to individuals and organizations for the conservation of Alberta's historic resources, as well as studies and professional services for the conservation of those historic resources. Indigenous historic places that cannot be designated as a Provincial or Municipal Historic Resource, but are protected through a Band Council Resolution, are eligible.

Grants are also available for studies, reports, plans and professional services for architects, engineers and other professional consultants associated with the conservation of a historic place.

Read more details on [conservation grants](#), including applications, grant amounts and eligibility.

Heritage Awareness Grants

Heritage Awareness grants provide funding to various forms of initiatives that interpret or promote awareness of Alberta's history. Eligible projects may include the design of recognition/interpretive signage, the delivery of educational programs, professional development opportunities or projects that encourage public involvement in heritage preservation.

Read more details on [Heritage Awareness grants](#), including applications, grant amounts and eligibility.

Resources

- [Glenbow Library and Archive](#)
- Library and Archives Canada:
 - [Indigenous Heritage](#)
 - [Native Residential Schools in Canada: A Selective Bibliography](#)
 - [Residential School Records Resources](#)
 - [The Legacy of the Residential School System in Canada: A Selective Bibliography \(August 2009\)](#)
- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#)
- [Remembering the Children Society](#)

Contact Info

Residential School Location, Research, Recognition

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Royal Alberta Museum

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