



Skwxwú7mesh  
Úxwumixw

## BACKGROUNDER

### Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations Announce Investigation at Former St. Paul's Indian Residential School Site



Catholic church officials with Indigenous children outside St. Paul's Indian Residential School in North Vancouver. Source: INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL HISTORY AND DIALOGUE CENTRE

On August 10, 2021, the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) announced it had embarked on an Indigenous-led initiative, on behalf of its people and in partnership with its relatives the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and səliłwətaɣ̓ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, to find answers about the children who attended the former St. Paul's Indian Residential School but never made it home.

#### THE HISTORY OF ST. PAUL'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

Also known as the Squamish Indian Residential School, St. Paul's Indian Residential School in present-day North Vancouver was the only residential school in Metro Vancouver. It was located next to the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw community of Eslhá7an.

In 1899, the federal government's Department of Indian Affairs established it as a residential school and was responsible for its funding. The school was managed and operated by the Roman Catholic Religious Teaching Order, the Sisters of Child Jesus.

Children in the school were segregated by age group and gender, and were often not permitted to visit other family members in the school. They were stripped of their culture and punished for speaking their native languages or taking part in their cultural traditions.

Approximately 75 Indigenous children lived at the three-storey wood-frame residential school at any given time, and there was documentation of overcrowding. In 1931, the local Indian Agent reported after an inspection that he suspected the children were not being fed properly. In 1933, the Indian Commissioner for British Columbia described the school as a 'death-trap' and a 'fire-trap.' In 1935, the school suffered an epidemic of chicken pox. Overcrowding continued into the 1950s. In 1957, the building was condemned and closed two years later.

In total, more than 2,000 children, representing six generations of Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm and səliłwətaɣ̓ Nations – and other Indigenous communities – were institutionalized at St. Paul's from grades one through eight. Oral histories told by St. Paul's survivors include stories about children who disappeared, having never made it safely home to their communities from the school. After grade eight, generations of older Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm and səliłwətaɣ̓ children were forced to attend Kamloops Indian Residential School, where at least 215 of them did not make it home alive.



Following the closure of St. Paul's Indian Residential School in 1959, the lands were handed over to the Roman Catholic Church's Archdiocese of Vancouver by the federal government. In 1959, the St. Paul's building was torn down, and the current St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School, a Catholic private school, was erected on the site.

**St. Paul's memorial carving.** Skwxwú7mesh artist Jason Nahanee, a survivor of St. Paul's Indian Residential School, made a seven-foot-tall, red-cedar carving that shows two children positioned above a concrete circular base. The base depicts ancestors travelling in a canoe through waves, representing the challenging and ongoing journey of residential school survivors, including the reclamation of the traditional Skwxwú7mesh culture, language and dance. The waves are made from cedar tiles that are engraved with the names of some of the Indigenous children who survived St. Paul's.

The memorial is located on the grounds of the present-day St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School on a grassy section adjacent to West 6th Street. The monument was created in collaboration between the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, the Sisters of the Child Jesus, the Assembly of First Nations and the City of North Vancouver, and it was unveiled at the high school in 2014.

### **ABOUT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS IN CANADA AND B.C.**

In Canada, the federal government established 139 residential schools between 1831 and 1996. In B.C., there were 18 residential schools that operated between 1867 and 1984. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were the major denominations involved in the administration of the residential school system.

Residential schools were created as a central element in the federal government's Aboriginal policy. Their express purpose was to separate Indigenous children from their families to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society. This strategy was designed to enable the federal government to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Indigenous people and gain control over their lands and resources.

Across the country, an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed and separated from their families and communities to attend residential schools. Thousands went missing or died, yet throughout the history of Canada's residential school system, there was no system-wide record keeping of what happened to these children. Incomplete records indicate that more than 6,000 children from across the country never made it home to their families.

### **SQUAMISH NATION AND THE TRC**

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw continues to urgently call for the implementation of Action 75 and 76 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – and these must be implemented at the St. Paul's Indian Residential School site.

Action 75 and 76 include strategies and procedures for the identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried (75); and for this work to be led by the Indigenous communities most affected and for work to respect Indigenous culture and customs (76).



Only 10 out of the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been completed to date. Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw continues to urge the federal government, all institutions, First Nations leaders, and people of Canada to demand the full, cooperative and timely implementation and completion of this work.

## ABOUT SQUAMISH NATION'S PEOPLE AND LANDS

### Who are the people of the Squamish Nation?

Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stelmexw (Squamish People) are an Indigenous People who live in the territory of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh that they have called home for +8,600 years. They speak the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Sníchim (Squamish language).

The Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) was founded on July 23, 1923, when the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stelmexw and its leaders voted to amalgamate the several Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh bands into a single entity, the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw, combining resources and working together to guide, provide, and protect the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stelmexw and their lands.

### How many people are members of the Squamish Nation?

Currently, the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw has over 4,050 official members. The largest proportion of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stelmexw – 47 per cent – live on 23 reserves spanning modern-day Vancouver, North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Gibson's Landing, and the district of Squamish. Others live elsewhere in B.C., Canada, and around the world.

### Where are the Squamish Nation's traditional and unceded lands?

The total area of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Territory is 6,921 square kilometres (692,100 hectares). This territory includes some of the present-day cities of Vancouver, Burnaby and New Westminster, all of the cities of North Vancouver and West Vancouver, Port Moody and the District of Squamish and the Municipality of Whistler. These boundaries embrace all of Howe Sound, Burrard Inlet and English Bay, as well as the rivers and creeks that flow into these bodies of water. In addition, Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Stelmexw used and occupied the various islands located in Howe Sound.

The percentage of Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Territory allotted to its people today, due to colonial forces, is only 0.4230% as Indian Reserve lands.

The Nation has never ceded or surrendered title to its lands, rights to its resources, or the power to make decisions within its territory.

## SOURCES

- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: [archives.nctr.ca/St-Pauls-Residential-School-Squamish](https://archives.nctr.ca/St-Pauls-Residential-School-Squamish); [nctr.ca/residential-schools/british-columbia/st-pauls-squamish/](https://nctr.ca/residential-schools/british-columbia/st-pauls-squamish/); [ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf)
- Indian Residential School History & Dialogue Centre, UBC: [collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/entities/56](https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/entities/56); [irshdc.ubc.ca/learn/indian-residential-schools/](https://irshdc.ubc.ca/learn/indian-residential-schools/)
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- Government of Canada: [rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100015576/1571581687074](https://rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100015576/1571581687074)