

BELIEF, BACKBONE, AND BULLDOZERS!

FERGUS O'GRADY'S VISION OF  
CATHOLIC, "INTEGRATED" EDUCATION  
IN NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA  
1956 - 1989

by

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ABSTRACT

Little has been written of either parochial or integrated educational history in northern British Columbia. Prince George College, founded in 1956 by Bishop Fergus O'Grady of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, represents a particular attempt by the Catholic community of the Diocese of Prince George to offer a Catholic education for both Aboriginal and white students in northern British Columbia.

Using the personal and professional files of the late Bishop O'Grady and other documentary evidence made available to me by the Archives of the Diocese of Prince George an attempt has been made to construct an image of Bishop O'Grady's "vision" for Prince George College. Using letters, memos, minutes, personal notes, and a number of available monographs on the subject of parochial, Aboriginal, integrated, and northern Canadian education, this thesis begins the process of piecing together some of the bishop's plans and visions for the school from its founding to its change of name in 1989 to "O'Grady Catholic High School" and eventual closing in June, 2001.

Chapter One details the bishop's construction of not only the school's financial groundwork, but more importantly its ethos - a narrative rooted in century's old

stories of the Oblates and their pioneering efforts to establish Christianity in northern B.C. The second chapter examines the role of volunteerism and parental support in staffing the school. In particular, much credit must be given to the Frontier Apostles - a lay, volunteer organization started by Bishop O'Grady - for the day-to-day running of the school for most of its thirty years. The third chapter looks specifically at the "integrated" nature of the school - the supposed presence of integration of both Aboriginal and white students.

What is constructed is an image of the bishop's vision that finally provides some context to his plans for the school. The school lay on a foundation of a carefully constructed ethos, the sacrifices of hundreds of lay volunteers, and the involuntary financial subsidies provided by Aboriginal students from approximately 1960 to 1989.

The school finally closed its doors in 2001 citing both financial difficulties and a lack of local parental support. Much can be learned from the mistakes of the past in any future attempts to re-open the institution.

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## INTRODUCTION

Prince George College in Context:

An "Integrated", Catholic Secondary School  
for Northern British Columbia.

1956 - 1989

When I graduated from Prince George College Catholic High School in 1988 I received the "Bishop O'Grady Award" for academic and extra-curricular excellence. It was awarded to the student who best personified the qualities of leadership and excellence modeled by Bishop O'Grady during his thirty years as bishop of the diocese of Prince George. More importantly, I received the award from the man for whom the much-coveted trophy was named: Bishop John Fergus O'Grady, member of the religious community of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and, at the time, Bishop Emeritus. It was an honor I have never forgotten and a high point in a personal relationship with a man I had known since childhood and would continue to know intimately until his death in 1998. In an interview two years previous to his death, Bishop O'Grady spoke enthusiastically of the "thirty years of great adventure" connected with his work in education in the diocese (1).

As a student at three of the schools Bishop O'Grady had constructed in his time - Saint Mary's Elementary, Immaculate Conception Elementary, and Prince George College - I was well aware of the "legendary" quality of this man. His charisma and boundless energy continue to inspire many educators and Church leaders in the Catholic community of

northern British Columbia, particularly in the work of schooling.

This project began in 1998 when the future of "Prince George College" seemed to be in question. In response to discussions that arose in the local Catholic educational community concerning the original attitudes and ambitions of the school's founder, Bishop Fergus O'Grady, I decided to conduct research into the school's development during Bishop O'Grady's administration in the 1960s through to its demise as a school for "integrated" education of Aboriginal and white students in the late 1980s.

In my review of diocesan archival material, particularly the personal files of Bishop O'Grady, I discovered a wealth of correspondence attesting to the late bishop's ambitions regarding Catholic and Native education at the only Catholic high school in northern British Columbia. In particular, I noticed the early struggles he had in securing funding, maintaining a stable work force, and constructing the appearance of an "integrated" student body of both regional First Nations youth and local "day" or white youth. These three challenges, met with varying degrees of success and failure, form the organizational framework for my research. These files had never yet been used for historical research and I wanted to be able to

document at least part of the story that they told. In the first chapter I examine local efforts to secure adequate funding at the private level through donations and grants from corporations across North America. Later I examine the bishop's efforts to obtain provincial and federal funding. The next chapter discusses the challenge to maintain a work force of teachers and support staff alongside the needs and ambitions of local families and young people. In the third chapter I focus on the school's "integrated" label and how it was often successfully manipulated in efforts to obtain necessary resources to allow for the creation and development of Prince George College.

On the basis of archival research conducted with the permission of the Diocese of Prince George something of the early history of the school has been reconstructed. The voices present in these archival documents are primarily those of Bishop O'Grady himself and, through his personal and professional correspondence, various school officials, teaching staff, Native band offices, the Department of Indian Affairs officials, local members of the Oblate religious community, municipal, provincial, and federal officials, parents, and some members of the local and provincial business community.

The decision to focus on resources from the Diocese of Prince George arose from a personal desire to document, at least partially, some of the history of my own high school through what material was available. And yet, while my proximity to the local church community made this access less problematic for investigating a story that was part of my own personal history, it also caused challenges. At the same time, my reliance on diocesan archives that did not include personal papers or files resulted in an incomplete picture of O'Grady's vision as his own personal sympathies and emotions are often left out of official correspondence. The archives, as constructed and maintained by local church authority, are themselves the product of careful manipulation and a process of selection that must be considered part of the voice of Bishop O'Grady here reconstructed.

As Elizabeth Furniss has indicated, a reliance on traditional sources, such as the great majority of the diocesan records, often excludes "Native perspectives" (2). In fact, many perspectives are excluded most notably those of Aboriginal and white students, and parents. Celia Haig-Brown adds, however, that "careful interpretation can expose the EuroCanadian bias" of much of this documentary material (3). Or, as Raymond Huel states, discourse

regarding Native students of Catholic schools can actually reveal more about the attitudes and ambitions of the dominant society than anything "objective" about Native people themselves (4). It follows that Native perspectives have been difficult to obtain. I have used secondary sources that successfully critique the work of missionaries in the Canadian West and the legacy of various residential schools (5). The reader should be cautioned that this research will not examine or speculate on allegations of physical and sexual abuse in residential or "integrated" schools in northern B.C. This research focuses, rather, on the history of one school administered initially by the provincial and federal governments, staffed by volunteers, and attended by both Native and white students from 1960 to 1989.

This research, therefore, is much narrower in that it is about the perspective of Bishop O'Grady himself and his Oblate colleagues and attempts to utilize for the first time the documents available from the Diocese of Prince George. Secondary sources related to residential schools have allowed for a more critical interpretation of the Aboriginal presence at "P.G.C." especially when the documentary sources rarely speak from a "Native perspective." This significant, though secondary, element

of the school's history is discussed in the third chapter because the missionary drive to "convert and civilize" the Native people was part of the ambitions O'Grady envisioned for the school. It is, therefore, "part of the main theme" though not the only story worth reconstructing as part of the school's history.

I have chosen to only assess O'Grady's perspective at present because of the central role he played in building the school and overseeing both its mandate and shifting clientele for approximately thirty years. Certainly there are many other stories to tell awaiting the researcher with access to First Nations band offices, for example, and interviews with former students and volunteer teachers.

But, as Huel has commented:

A peripheral study of residential schools would not do justice to the sensational and controversial subject of abuse. Only a detailed and thorough study conducted by someone well versed in pedagogy and social psychology could make a meaningful contribution to the debate. (6)

Huel adds that the issue of abuse "must not be studied in isolation but within the context of the educational system in general" (7). It is my hope that this story will one day be told in its entirety.

Understandably my close proximity to the material has made access to diocesan sources less difficult, but

locating myself in the research more problematic at times. It has also clearly influenced my choice of research material and narrowed it considerably. In this context the school will be evaluated as both an extension of Roman Catholicism in northern B.C. and a continuation of Canadian colonialist policy intent on transforming the Native student both physically and culturally. Because of these factors, when the doors of the school seemed ready to be closed forever in 1999 I felt the school's mixed legacy of success and failure had become an issue worthy of discussion. And yet, as unique as this story might be, little has been written concerning the history of British Columbia's Aboriginal, northern, and denominational educational institutions.

In the 1950s the education of Aboriginal Canadians underwent changes. These have not yet become part of British Columbia's educational historiography. In general, a series of legislative changes reworded post-war assimilationist schemes to satisfy the new language of "integration." Little has been written in British Columbia of early experimental "integrated" institutions or more recent cases of specific schools where post-WWII federal integration policies were applied or at least were given the appearance of "integration." There is, however, an

increasing interest in the history of residential schools (as opposed to "integrated" schools) that for the time being offers a useful critique of denominational education aimed at cultural assimilation of Aboriginal youth (8).

Among the most important writers in this area of research have been Jean Barman, John Miller, Thomas Lascelles, Vincent J. McNally, and Margaret Whitehead. Looking at personal stories from "inside" the schools and examining the ethnocentrism of their personnel have also been Jo-Ann Fiske among the Carrier, Elizabeth Furniss at St. Joseph's School in Williams Lake, Celia Haig-Brown at Kamloops Residential School, and Bridget Moran's personal and more general history of the Carrier in northern B.C.

Similarly, "little is known about the precise nature of private education in British Columbia" (9). Jean Barman's research into the Vernon Preparatory School in the Okanagan Valley reveals a type of educational institution, often denominational in nature, that is usually "inaccessible to outsiders" and "exempt from public regulation" (10). Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant schools have rarely been researched or their histories published apart from a few school studies and histories of religious communities (11). What has been written is usually triumphalist in tone and stands out for its lack of

critical interpretation of issues surrounding class, racial identity, or gender. And certainly very little has been written of the almost twenty, Catholic "joint" or "integrated" private schools in B.C. that have existed since the middle of the century (12).

There is also an emphasis, due in part to the centralization of academic professionals and political power in the urban, southern regions of the country, favoring research on educational institutions in the more populated areas of Canada in general and British Columbia in particular - what one Catholic historian once called a "neglected and forgotten area" (13). This point is made especially clear in examining the general lack of monographs, articles, or theses on residential, "integrated", or private and denominational institutions in the northern and rural areas of British Columbia (14). Local voices on issues of northern British Columbia educational history have not been heard. Their experiences instead for the most part subsumed into that of their southern and urban counterparts, thus ignoring possible differences caused by geographical distance and location. Except for more recent scholarship examining residential schools at Kamloops, Williams Lake, and Fraser Lake, and accounts of William Duncan's work at Metlakatla, B.C.'s

less-populated, Northern Interior communities have been largely neglected by the academic community.

As a graduate from Prince George College - an "integrated", Catholic, and northern high school - and resident of northern British Columbia from 1970 to 1988, I am acutely aware of the scarcity of historical research devoted to attempts at integrated schooling as well as private and denominational schools in British Columbia, and more generally, the history of schooling in less populated regions of the province in the period following the Second World War.

I grew up in the Interior of British Columbia - specifically in the Bulkley Valley region in the eastern shadow of the Coast Mountains and in the city of Prince George, the largest city in the northern half of the province. I attended Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the city from 1976 to 1988, institutions that were founded by members of the Roman Catholic Missionary Order of Mary Immaculate and often staffed by the Sisters of Mercy from Ireland as well as by hundreds of lay volunteers. This became my "community" - a religious minority in the city, but one with both a long and complex history in the region and with a very international orientation. Many of these schools were almost entirely

staffed by recent Western European immigrants or transplanted Eastern Canadians and Americans.

It follows that as a member of the dominant society - though a visible minority of both European and Asian descent - the Catholic education I obtained was generally altogether "normal" to me and I absorbed it largely uncritically. Part of my own integration into the dominant society has, in fact, taken place within the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic education after Vatican II (1962 - 1965) was aimed at the "promotion of culture" and the "human formation of young people." It sought, according to ecclesiastical documents, to "orient the whole of human culture to the message of salvation." Church officials traditionally expected Catholic parents to take full advantage of Catholic schools in their communities and at the very least to support their endeavors financially. As Bishop O'Grady stated in a letter directed to Catholic parents:

Parents must ponder seriously about sending their high school sons and daughters to any institution other than a Catholic high school. It is a grave obligation, as Vatican II says, on the part of parents to provide religious education for their children. Prince George College does provide that education for their children. You must do your part to comply with God's will as expressed so clearly by Holy Mother the Church. (15)

That Catholic education was by its label "universal" but also more "elitist" by tradition in North America was a concept not lost on many Catholic families in Prince George. Despite misinformed stereotypes about O'Grady's "Indian school", white Roman Catholic families would see Prince George College as a superior alternative to secular schools that were regularly villified as amoral, liberal, and undisciplined. One institution alone embodied the conflicting images of a poor, underfunded institution and a private, wealthy Catholic school.

The experiences of my twelve years in these Catholic "joint" schools have influenced me greatly and put me in a particular position to tell part of the story of Prince George College. I shared many of Bishop O'Grady's attitudes and ambitions and have only recently begun to interpret them critically. Even today I struggle with the problems of reconciling my religious faith and experience with the requirements of critical research. I continue to be interested in Aboriginal history and culture and yet, ironically, learned little of what I now know from my twelve years in "integrated" classrooms. Newly-arrived Irish and English teachers could do little to assist in a process of cross-cultural reflection or sensitivity - the purported aims of integrated education. And while my own

contact with and understanding of Oblates, their history, and their "sense of mission" are deep and intimate, I am angered by a history of contact with Aboriginal people that was insensitive, arrogant, and racist. Yet, while I abhor the insensitivity, I still care for the many men and women who were part of my education and worked to stamp a Catholic presence on northern British Columbia. I continue to be torn by these often-conflicting perceptions of my education.

Having said this, however, it is not the intention of this paper to engage in cross-cultural analysis or to offer a critical examination of how Aboriginal students or white students actually experienced the school. Instead, the research aims at unraveling three of the key components of Bishop O'Grady's "vision" for "P.G.C." I examine Aboriginal and white students as they are viewed by the founder of the school and his correspondents. I have concentrated on the official material - most in the form of letters, memos, handbooks, and minutes from various meetings. I have not sought out nor discussed the Catholic community at large. There is no significant explanation, for example, of the participation of the local business community in the early 1960s when their donations seemed to help tremendously through some economic difficulties. Much

more as well can be said of the "Frontier Apostles" - a name given to the four thousand lay volunteers who worked in the region for thirty years - but these documents remain unavailable to me, although in the diocesan archives. I have, however, consulted a wide range of secondary sources on B.C. educational history, local church history, and religious and residential schools that allows me to appreciate the wider context in which the "official" story that I have examined can be understood.

An introductory examination of Prince George College brings into focus a number of different "strands" of current educational history. As J.D. Wilson stated: "The study of educational history is now very broadly defined" (16). Historians once preferred a more traditional, institutional approach "from above" that often sentimentalized events and documented the triumph of certain schools or school models over others. Today, however, educational historians examine schooling "as a multifaceted phenomenon concerned with the everyday life of children, young people, and adults" (17).

Catholic education has a long history in Canada and elsewhere and a perceived "tradition of excellence" both within and outside of the Catholic community. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to critique Catholic

education generally, it is enough to say that it claims to be as much an indoctrination into the precepts of the faith as a classical or preparatory education. Unlike Catholic education aimed at dominant society, Catholic missionary education was aimed at "converting and civilizing" the Aboriginal people by isolating them from the dominant society. This made it more difficult to successfully enter that dominant society beyond formal schooling. At P.G.C. one sees two distinct educational models - one aimed at post-secondary preparation for white students, another aimed at Aboriginal youth obtaining enough European "culture and religion" to live in the mainstream Canadian society. Church officials often observed that Aboriginal students did not fare well in public schools alongside white youth. State-run, public schools were viewed as generally inferior because of their perceived mandate to be nondenominational and therefore secular, amoral, and philosophically relativistic.

The missionary school is a particular type of Catholic school and while it is not often viewed as classical or elitist it seems both constructs existed at Prince George College at the same time. The Catholic missionary school was the single most important tool used by government, the churches, and ultimately the dominant society to transform

the Native - physically and culturally. In this sense Prince George College must be set against a backdrop of historical efforts aimed at assimilation through cultural invasion and Aboriginal efforts aimed at resistance (18). Catholic education since the Second Vatican Council strives to prepare students to live in a modern, secular world with certain moral values that will assist them in making important decisions. At least officially, Vatican II opened the way for more liberal-minded church officials to proclaim the gospel not from a Western, European cultural perspective, but from the historical context and cultural traditions of the peoples being evangelized (19). It does not appear, however, that this took place at Prince George College, or that Aboriginal academic success was attributable to the school's denominational (versus secular) environment.

Regardless of these shifting labels attributed to Catholic education it would be difficult to summarize the many reasons Catholics and non-Catholics sent their children to Prince George College. For many there would have been very practical reasons such as smaller class sizes, a more advantageous student-to-teacher ratio, access to a variety of athletic and fine arts "electives", and the perception once again of a strict code of discipline that

would guarantee order and civility that were presumed nonexistent by the 1970s in the public school system.

A particular Catholic philosophy of education was articulated by the French missionary Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.). It was essentially a Catholic, classical education borrowed from pre-revolutionary France and applied to both Aboriginal and European youth. It provided Bishop O'Grady an educational vision for First Nations and EuroCanadian students within the framework of the political and social climate of the times. Furthermore, the Catholic backdrop in British Columbia provided a history and context reaching back over a hundred years: in the 1840s the Oblates began missionary work on Vancouver Island, at Puget Sound, and along the Columbia River; in 1861, St. Mary's Mission was established on the Fraser River and such "missions" ensued throughout the province - 1867 at Williams Lake, 1873 at Fort Saint James, 1893 at Kamloops, and 1922 at Fraser Lake. Among other duties, O'Grady oversaw Kamloops Residential School when it had Canada's largest residential school population. The residential school, clearly a part of Ottawa's destructive assimilationist policies, developed in the late nineteenth-century along American "Indian school" models. After Confederation, when Canada's Aboriginal population

became subject to the Department of Indian Affairs, these state-owned, church-run institutions dotted the Canadian landscape - particularly in Western Canada. In most regions, they supplanted earlier Christian mission schools near Aboriginal villages that had pre-dated Confederation and did not come under state control. O'Grady was instrumental in the history of British Columbia residential schools, particularly in Kamloops and this must have influenced his later efforts at Prince George College.

In 1956, Fergus O'Grady - after having spent a number of years at the residential schools in Mission, Williams Lake, and Kamloops, and later named Provincial in charge of all English-speaking Oblates in Canada - was consecrated bishop of Prince George and set about establishing Catholic day schools for an "integrated" student body of native and white youth in the Interior of B.C. (20). This culminated in the establishment of Prince George Junior College in 1962.

Part of O'Grady's vision for this school was the use of a large, Catholic voluntary labor force - a key ingredient in the school's early identity and a major source of financial subsidy for the school's operation. Few would have predicted that many of these lay volunteers would become part of the backbone of the Catholic community

in many parts of British Columbia. Arriving from parts of Western Europe, Eastern Canada, across the United States, as well as the Philippines and Japan, these "lay" (non-clerical) volunteers ensured a ready supply of workers to staff classrooms, dormitories, and cafeterias; to drive buses and provide janitorial and construction services; and ultimately to provide an administration which included deans of residence, principals and vice principals, and eventually newly-formed religious communities. These "Frontier Apostles" provided a young, energetic labor pool and a major economic benefit. Their salaries were nominal, a small fraction of the cost of a similar work force in state-run, provincial, unionized public schools. This fact - the financial benefits of a voluntary work force - is often forgotten. In keeping with the missionary ethos of P.G.C. this lay voluntarism was intended to prove the value and benefits of a Christian lifestyle to local Catholic youth. A renunciation of material concerns allowed these teachers to focus on their "mission" to teach young people in northern British Columbia.

Finally, the enrollment of many British Columbia Aboriginal students over a quarter of a century provides a particular dimension to the school's educational history - one that reveals much about the school's "integrated"

nature and the difficulty in securing the necessary financial resources. In a day-to-day sense, Aboriginal students' presence should have added particular curricular and pedagogical dimensions but were often overlooked or ignored. As Jo-Ann Fiske has observed at Lejac Residential School in Fraser Lake, it seems that Aboriginal youth were expected to enroll in vocational and remedial courses. P.G.C., however, experimented with Aboriginal language programs, wilderness clubs, and Native heritage associations. A remedial program named "Thunderbird" provided at least in theory educational assistance to both Native and white students. Many of the initiatives were clearly intended to appease any concerns among parents and the Oblates that "integration" was not taking place at P.G.C. while at the same time encourage more Native students to enroll. They point to O'Grady's intention to be more progressive in his approach to First Nations education, even though they clearly missed the mark in providing a truly integrated education.

These "integration" policies, however, began in Canada in the 1950s and 1960s prior to the Native Brotherhood's policy paper in 1972 and its push for "good schools in Indian communities" (21). They were one of a number of schemes constructed by Ottawa and its Department of Indian

Affairs since Confederation that aimed, at varying degrees, to solve the "Indian problem" using various forms of coercive and subtle assimilation. In general, federal policies aimed at goals that clearly contradicted much of what took place at P.G.C.:

a little literacy on the cheap together with sufficient inculcation of European ways to keep the coming generation acquiescent and quiescent.  
(22)

Influenced by a change of policy in the United States almost thirty years earlier along with social pressures in North American, post-War society the federal government gave official sanction to a policy of integration in 1948 that continued until a general North American shift towards Aboriginal self-determination in politics and education in the late 1960s. Theoretically, integration meant "equality" and "having Indian children educated in association with non-Indian children" so that there was a presumption of equality of culture and spirituality. In practice it took on different forms at different schools. There seems to be little indication that what took place at Prince George College was what Ottawa had originally intended (23). "Integration" at Prince George College merely meant the "presence" of Aboriginal students - in residences, classrooms, and clubs on terms that clearly

identified them as inferior. Most obvious at the time, however, was a change in financial arrangements. Ottawa entered into an agreement with Catholic as well as other private educational authorities similar to contracts signed with the public school system. This was the economic benefit of "integration" at Prince George College. It is possible that Fergus O'Grady knew of the potential economic benefits of Aboriginal and "integrated" education from his days at Kamloops Indian Residential School in the 1930s (24).

It was this shrewd business sense that strongly supported the presence of First Nations students, in particular, to offset some of the opening and operating costs of the institution - in essence, subsidizing Catholic education in northern B.C. (25). Because true integration never existed at Prince George College, First Nations families were in fact financially supporting Catholic endeavors in the region without the corresponding integration. A number of documents attest to this twofold "vision" of integration policies. One plan was to take advantage of federal funds earmarked to build and often maintain "joint" schools. The other plan was to attempt to integrate or in fact assimilate Native students into white

society and to a European-created, "pan-Indian culture" by schooling Native students alongside white peers.

Later, as the Indian Brotherhood's so-called 'red paper' policy of 1972 stated, at its best, "Integration is a broad concept of human development which provides for growth through mingling the best elements of a wide range of human differences" (26). In the case of Prince George College, O'Grady and the Oblates provided housing to Native students coming to the school from distant and often remote Aboriginal communities in northern British Columbia. This was not integration in any sense of the word, but presented a façade of integration. What is clear is that the "integration" attempted at Prince George College was not the policy envisioned by government or Indian Brotherhood policy-makers who saw a synthesis of cultures rather than varieties of tokenism and outright assimilation.

What follows, then, is a discussion of these three elements - the school's historical background as constructed by the struggles for funds, obtaining volunteers, and Aboriginal "integration." The discussion also seeks to provide a voice for the school's founder, Fergus O'Grady, his "visions" for the school, and a footnote to his work and accomplishments in Northern British Columbia.

The first chapter will examine how Bishop O'Grady and the Oblates constructed several "visions" for the school and successfully used them to acquire financial resources, encourage lay volunteers to work at the school, and ultimately to convince the Catholic community in Prince George to support these efforts by enrolling students. The second chapter discusses the involvement of Frontier Apostles at Prince George College and the support provided them by parents in the Roman Catholic community. Finally, in the third chapter there is a discussion of the presence of Aboriginal students at Prince George College and the "appearance of integration." This paper does not claim to know the "Aboriginal perspective" or "perspectives" at the school. Using documentary evidence from O'Grady's files, the attempt is instead to reconstruct and evaluate the bishop's "vision" for an Aboriginal presence at P.G.C.

My aim throughout is to analyze these three pivotal elements in the school's history as part of Bishop O'Grady's "vision." While the sources are primarily those supplied by the diocesan archives, some personal anecdotes from my own five years at Prince George College are included in order to highlight O'Grady's "vision." I do not claim to speak for him nor for the Oblates, Frontier Apostles, or students - both white or Aboriginal.

CHAPTER ONE

Bishop Fergus O'Grady,  
Oblates of Mary Immaculate,  
and the Vision of  
Prince George College.

1956 - 1983

Central to O'Grady's vision of Prince George College was the role its Oblate history and educational mandate would play in securing private donations and public funding from 1960 to the early 1980s. Appeals to private donors were made in a "pioneer" spirit of Catholic tradition, local history, and nostalgia. Public funding for Aboriginal education, private schooling, and post-secondary degree-granting status often rested on carefully constructed images of the school. It was considered a unique experiment in northern, Catholic, "integrated" education.

In the 1950s, following the "boom years" of the post-World War II era, the "good life" arrived in B.C.'s Northern Interior. Fergus O'Grady seemed poised to take advantage of this newfound prosperity and optimism. Like W.A.C. Bennett, the provincial premier who ushered in this era of material abundance, the bishop would also lead by the force of his personality. He was the brilliant salesman of an epic narrative, akin to a kind of spiritual "Manifest Destiny." The ability to create instant visions that inspired people to work tirelessly towards their realization, and the careful management of a variety of financial resources characterized his administrative career.

The financial challenges met in constructing Prince George College were among many obstacles overcome by Bishop O'Grady. Through a clever process of public and private fundraising that connected to stories and legends of past Oblate "greatness" and a "vision" for Prince George College, the funds arrived. The Oblates carefully constructed this "vision" so that wealthy individuals, companies, organizations, and governments could easily endorse it. Parsimony had become and continued to be a hallmark of parochial education in British Columbia dating back to Confederation (1). This situation, therefore, required a shrewdness on the part of the Oblates and a knack for constructing public perceptions to overcome the financial challenges and thus create spaces of freedom in the midst of religious prejudice and injustices.

Perhaps few clerics in B.C. history understood these circumstances better than Fergus O'Grady who had been instrumental in the development of residential schools across British Columbia. He maintained that Prince George College was built on a "tradition that went back many centuries" (2). This "tradition" meant that it was constructed as an Oblate school to evangelize the poor and an "Indian" (integrated) institution.

These traditions were often manipulated both in the earliest days of financial insecurity and in later challenges such as the fight for Indian access to parochial education (1969), the acquisition of a charter for post-secondary, degree-granting instruction (1966), and the struggle for partial funding of independent schools in British Columbia (1977). O'Grady knew this history as well as the political challenges of operating a Catholic, northern educational institution. He also knew how to cultivate and manage the political context to advance his plans for a secondary school in Prince George. His many attempts at circumventing legislation and carefully controlling social and historical constructions were acts of agency set against the backdrop of an increasingly secularized, and often anti-denominational, urban, southern political landscape in B.C. In the period extending from the school's inception in the mid-1950s to his retirement in the mid-1980s, O'Grady's perception of P.G.C. would prove pivotal to its development, success, and growth and ultimately, its limitations. As W. Murphy, principal of P.G.C. said in 1979: "Our greatest source of strength is the faith, conviction, and inspiration of Bishop O'Grady and his willingness to financially support Prince George College" (3). For all intents and purposes he worked a

spell that seemed to hold the school together for thirty years. This "magic" was, of course, his ability to orchestrate an historical narrative and then entice business, government, and the Catholic community to buy into his vision.

As a result, the bishop often engaged in the use of paternalistic language when referring to Aboriginal students and heroic missionary deeds, classic examples of the "benevolent paternalism" so often cited in the records and correspondence of Oblate residential schools. From the start, O'Grady's school was Catholic in philosophy and instruction, although multi-denominational in terms of its student body - it would never refuse entrance to non-Catholic families. It was part of the well-known history of Oblate missionary activity in the Pacific Northwest and more specifically, the northern interior regions of British Columbia. His letters and references throughout his administration echoed the refrain that "The tradition on which Prince George College is built goes back many centuries" (4). This ethnocentric tradition was often constructed as one aimed at "taming the wilderness" as well as "civilizing the landscape" for European immigrants and Aboriginal communities.

The founder of this "order" (a Catholic, religious community of men or women sharing a common rule of life) was Charles Eugene De Mazenod, bishop of Marseilles, France, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mazenod received official approval from Rome in 1826 to initiate a community of "Oblates" (from the Latin, meaning to "offer oneself") under the special protection of the Blessed Virgin. Its motto since its earliest days was "To preach the gospel to the poor" (5). De Mazenod added in the community's Constitution and Rules that "to extend the kingdom of Christ we must leave nothing undared!" (6). From the start the Oblates worked among the Parisian underclasses in revolutionary France. This training, it was argued by European clerics, would serve these men well in working later with Aboriginal people in the Americas. It was this "spirit of daring" that seemed to mark the arrival of Oblates to the Pacific Northwest between 1847 and 1857 as well as the subsequent construction and administration one hundred years later of O'Grady's new school in Prince George. It was all part of a grand narrative of civilizing an "untamed landscape" of "hardy pioneers" and "heathen natives." How local Aboriginal people responded to and viewed this experience supplies a very different story, often one of oppression and

exploitation. This has been addressed by many historians including Robert Choquette, Raymond A. Huel, and Vincent J. McNally who have pointed in varying degrees to the destructive legacy of Christian missionary activity.

The early efforts of Catholic missionaries amounted to no less than the introduction of hundreds of years of European culture and spiritual practices. In her account of their first hundred years in B.C., Kay Cronin - a well-known Catholic journalist and friend of Bishop O'Grady - indicates where the Oblates, and Bishop O'Grady in particular, perceived themselves within the sociohistorical context of Canada's Pacific province. She communicates their overwhelming confidence in the missionary enterprise:

It was their efforts and their successors' efforts that resulted in the establishing of Christianity in large areas of what we know today as British Columbia. (7)

Likewise, these efforts would be revisited and applied to the late twentieth century and the efforts associated with the Second Vatican Council.

"Vatican II" (1962 - 1965) was Rome's response to the "modern world" and an articulation of the Catholic Church's interpretation of the "modern lifestyle" rooted in secularism, agnosticism, consumerism, and atheism. Unlike the First Vatican Council over a hundred years earlier,

Vatican II was considered the start of a new era in Catholic Christianity encouraged by efforts at dialogue with other religions, greater openness to non-clerical participation in the Church, and an end to ultramontaniam which looked to Rome for spiritual guidance rather than to the power and authority of local or national churches. While the First Vatican Council was a condemnation of the modern world Vatican II was more of a "reconciliation." In this sense, Bishop O'Grady's efforts at encouraging lay voluntarism were conveniently regarded as rooted in the Second Council, even though the start of the Frontier Apostle Movement pre-dates Vatican II. In many ways, O'Grady's openness to the spirit of the Council enabled him to appear progressive even somewhat "revolutionary" in Catholic educational circles at the time.

In a summary of the school's mandate, O'Grady interpreted its many roles to include the need to "develop individuals to fit into the social, economic, political, and religious conditions of the actual society in which they live" (8), in other words, to indoctrinate and assimilate European and Aboriginal youth fully into mainstream society while serving the needs of "the people of North-Central British Columbia" and therefore "open to all regardless of race or creed" (9). This theme, too,

was decidedly in the "spirit" of Vatican II. In practice this meant that the school's goals would continue to be "to strengthen the total family" - that is, a "traditional" family - "develop personal self-discipline in the student" and "develop a sense of individual responsibility for oneself and others" (10). The mandate makes it clear that "specifically Catholic areas of study are not required by the curriculum", but "student involvement requires active participation in Christian activities." As well, as part of the application process, families were required to include a letter of recommendation from "a priest, minister of religion, or teacher" (11). Coinciding with P.G.C.'s post-conciliar Catholic nature, it comes as little surprise that O'Grady tried to staff the school through the 1960s and 1970s, at least in part, with members of other Catholic teaching orders, specifically the Sisters of St. Ann (12), Dominicans, Jesuits (13), and Basilians (14).

That Christianity and Roman Catholicism in particular were key ingredients in O'Grady's conception of P.G.C. was no accident given a long history in British Columbia. In 1983 at an Oblate celebration an Oblate spokesman made it unabashedly clear that

Who but our Oblate community could own the  
great heritage of the pioneer days that  
tamed the wild west, the stories of dedicated

men in wagon trains, canoes, horseback, and boats that brought the word of God to this vast frontier? (15)

Later, another Oblate would boldly proclaim that

Some day when all is said and done, when the beginnings of Domano and Prince George College are a matter for the historians, somebody is going to look back and discover the seeds of greatness which existed in the hearts of so many who have struggled and still struggle to leave behind a monument that will benefit generations to come. Our motivation for being here should be because we love God and we want to bring his love to others. (16)

Until well in to the 1980s there were never apologies for the missionary enterprise in British Columbia. In fact, it assisted publicity campaigns rather than hindered them, at least among whites.

Father J.V. O'Reilly, a native of Dublin, Ireland, who had worked in the diocese since 1948 and who was placed in charge of educational matters summed up the commonplace sense of uncritical celebration by stating that "The Catholic faith in Prince George had its great roots" in Quebec with Father Demers who came to the Pacific Northwest in the early nineteenth century; in Ireland with Father McGuckin, who also built the diocesan cathedral in Vancouver; and in France with Father A.G. Morice, who had worked closely with Carrier people around Stuart Lake in

the late nineteenth century (17). The Diogram, a diocesan newsletter, would also later outline the "birth of a school system" that started with the travels of Father Le Jacq, and later, in 1873, Father Allard's mission along Stuart Lake near present-day Fort Saint James. In 1922 the two Oblates' pioneering educational efforts set the groundwork for the construction of Lejac Indian Residential School, an Oblate-run, federal school until its closure in 1972 (18).

By the First World War, the vicariate of Prince Rupert had been established. Not until after the Second World War, however, would Catholic bishops in B.C., particularly Bishop O'Grady, begin an assertive campaign to build Catholic schools and continue a pattern of Catholic schooling (19). In regions such as Prince George, Kamloops, and sections of the Fraser Valley, this often meant "integrated" schools alongside or replacing older, federal residential schools for Aboriginal students. Bishop O'Grady set out to establish more than a dozen elementary and one secondary school in less than thirty years (20). Prince George College would be only one of many schools built before 1970.

Always thankful for the "courageous zeal of the early Oblate missionaries" (21), publicity for the only Catholic

secondary school spoke of the "grand heritage" of Prince George College:

As mighty as Canada's stately timbers,  
 As wide and high as the Dominion sky,  
 As challenging as the jagged peaks of  
 the Canadian Rockies,  
 As daring as man's struggle for a new  
 frontier!  
 This is the story of Prince George College!  
 (22)

The same brochure credited the Catholic institution with bringing distinctive benefits to northern B.C. and in particular the city of Prince George. At the "hub" of major artificial and natural transportation crossroads, the prospects and promises of Prince George seemed rooted in its physical setting. This mythic and patriarchal construction of the history, the region, and the mandate enabled the bishop's "vision" to materialize.

In contrast to Oblate activity the European presence in this region is in fact comparatively short. First and long settled by the Dakelh and Wet'suwet'en peoples whose ancestral lands included the region west from Prince George, north from the Blackwater River, east from Smithers, and south from Fort Babine, "Fort George" (or Lheitli in the Carrier language) sat at the confluence of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers. Built in 1807 as a remote

Hudson's Bay Company outpost, it was not incorporated as a city until the First World War. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s "Prince George" would remain a distant outpost reliant on forestry, logging, and a few sawmills (23). In 1952, however, only three years prior to Fergus O'Grady's appointment as bishop to the vast northern territory, the Pacific Great Eastern Railway, later renamed the British Columbia Railway, arrived to provide a key transportation link for both the movement of people and the export of resources to the southern portions of the province.

O'Grady arrived in the Prince George diocese in 1956 in the middle of a period of "generally rising wages", material prosperity, and growing self-confidence (24). The province was leading the nation in growth and Prince George was one of its fastest growing cities (25). The 1960s saw the arrival of several large pulp and paper mills that seemed to ensure the city's economic prosperity. While only fifty saw mills operated in the region in 1939, there were almost eight hundred in 1955 (26). And the population of the city had jumped from only 2,000 in 1941 to over 33,000 in 1971, complete with a growing hinterland that now included Vanderhoof, Fort Saint James, Mackenzie, Fort Saint John, and Dawson Creek (27). By 1986, at the end of his administration, O'Grady, had seen the city grow from

10,563 to almost 70,000 citizens (28). Clearly, as popular reports indicated, there were opportunities for "great men" and "heroic deeds" both in B.C. in general and in Prince George in particular.

Into this frenzy of growth and prosperity in the white community came the forty-eight year old bishop in 1956.

John Fergus O'Grady was the youngest of five boys and three girls born to Edward O'Grady and Helen Frith in 1908 in Macton, Ontario. He obtained his elementary and secondary education in Listowel, Ontario as well as Allan,

Saskatchewan, and at St. John's Junior College in Edmonton, Alberta. Most of his seminary training took place at the Oblate Scholasticate in Lebreton, Saskatchewan - attached to a Native residential school - and at St. Patrick's College in Ottawa where he would later teach both Latin and French.

He was ordained a priest in Saskatoon in 1934 and held several positions of leadership in British Columbia including a short term as Assistant Pastor at St.

Augustine's in Vancouver, Principal of St. Mary's Indian Residential School (Mission, B.C.) from 1936 to 1939,

Principal of Kamloops Indian Residential School from 1939 to 1952, and Principal of Cariboo Indian Residential School (Williams Lake) from 1952 to 1953. For the next five years

he was the appointed Provincial of all English-speaking Oblate priests in Canada.

Following this term, O'Grady was appointed vicar apostolic and bishop of what would become the Diocese of Prince George. He served the diocese as bishop for thirty years, finally retiring in 1986. Bishop O'Grady died in March, 1998 at the Oblate retirement community home in Saskatoon and was buried in the Oblate cemetery below the remnants of the old mission and residential school in Mission, B.C. (29). The central role played by Fergus O'Grady in the history of residential schooling in British Columbia cannot be overstated.

It is not difficult to see how hyperbolic labels became attached to the fledgling secondary institution which the young bishop set atop Peden Hill on two thousand rolling acres of campus overlooking the city of Prince George and the Fraser River. This was to be the crowning achievement of a man who had devoted so much of his life to the missionary enterprise in B.C. residential schools. Not only rich in its historical and religious contexts, Prince George College brochures - scripted by O'Grady and the Oblates - promised to have an impact "on all the citizens of British Columbia", "on business and industry", "on trade to the United States and other foreign nations" and it

would, indeed, help as a proposed junior college as well as high school to "relieve the overcrowded and congested conditions" at the University of British Columbia." If that were not enough, it would promise to establish "an effective medium that will oppose and fight the plague of Communism!" Prince George College became, in the bishop's lexicon, synonymous with "opportunity", "magic", "unlimited potential", "tremendous possibilities", "vision", and "daring" (30).

O'Grady set about organizing a massive campaign to raise the necessary funds for the construction of this new secondary school. He was well aware of federal parsimony from his eighteen years administering several B.C. residential schools. In the beginning it shared facilities with Sacred Heart parish and elementary school (1957-1960) and St. Mary's elementary school (1960-1962), under the names "Prince George Catholic High School", "Central Catholic High School", and eventually "Prince George Junior College." In March, 1961, O'Grady hired the services of an advertising agency to design a brochure and oversee the publicity of the school's anticipated move from shared facilities downtown to a new campus called "Domano" at the western edge of the city limits (31). This move was funded in part by local church donations as well as by the federal

government (31). In September of the same year, he procured the services of a fellow Oblate, Father Peter V. Rogers. Recruited from the Southern U.S. Oblate province based in Houston, Texas, Rogers would serve as a "special assistant" to "help publicize and promote the new, to-be-built college, Prince George College . . . the two million dollar dream" (32). A press release went on to suggest that the dream included a "model home cooperative housing project", "landing strips for both air and sea planes", and an "Olympic-sized pool." Brief reference was also made to its potential for "missionary" and "educational" work among the local Aboriginal people. None of these initiatives would ever materialize, but their inclusion in the publicity underlines the optimism of the bishop. Later, he would be quoted saying that "It's just a matter of the 3 B's: belief, backbone, and bulldozers" (33). Apparently, he then added "with a twinkle in his eye" that "banknotes help a lot, too!" (34).

To many the financial challenges of the school's early days would have appeared insurmountable. O'Grady chose Rogers for his earlier success with the media and public relations (35). By 1962 the "fund appeal" was in full swing. According to Bishop O'Grady's correspondence, the American Oblate had remarkable success from the start.

Despite the small percentage of Catholics in the region, he was able to garner the support of local politicians, business, and non-Catholic Christian leaders in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council's subsequent call towards greater ecumenism worldwide. Updating the Southern Oblate province in Texas, O'Grady said:

He kicked off the drive in the Anglican Church with the Anglican pastor giving it quite a boost. He also got the United Church minister to promote the drive and the first \$1000 cheque he got from a Jew. He certainly has won the hearts of all the non-Catholics and broken down all the prejudice in this area. In that way alone he has done a tremendous job. What money we got so far is practically all Protestant money. A few years ago such an accomplishment would have been unheard of. (36)

The Oblates were able to convince other religious communities of the need for a religious school in the region. Likewise, while promoting the school locally, the bishop also sent Rogers to both Vancouver and eastern Canada to contact head offices of companies with holdings in the Prince George area (37). At one luncheon in Vancouver with a public relations firm from San Francisco, Rogers suggested a scheme involving the appropriation of Aboriginal ceremonies to "sell" the school - the possibility of an "Indian troop" of dancers to assist by making appearances to business leaders. In this way,

"integration" was constructed locally to mean a mere reference to Aboriginal dances, clothing, and "exotic" ceremonials rather than the more complicated nature of true integration. "True" integration would have required the much more difficult decision to assimilate the white students to Aboriginal culture as much as the opposite. While this dance troupe never materialized, again its promise points to the use of images of the northern region as prime missionary territory and therefore "unique" in the province (38). It also serves to highlight that O'Grady and the Oblates' attitudes regarding Aboriginal people were in some ways unchanged since the earliest Oblate missionary activity among B.C. First Nations people. That this discourse assisted in O'Grady's appeals to business reveals more about the assimilationist aims and the continuing ethnocentrism of the religious and corporate elite in British Columbia.

More importantly, Rogers organized a number of luncheons in the late spring of 1962 with "prominent businessmen and industrialists" to promote the school and raise funds for its construction (39). On June 18, 1962, one such meal occurred at the Hotel Vancouver. Notables included the mayor of Vancouver, A.T. Alsbury; regional bank managers for Toronto Dominion, Bank of Nova Scotia,

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Royal Trust, and the Bank of Montreal; as well as representatives from Standard Oil, Canadian Forest Products, Canadian Pacific Airlines, C.P. Rail, Eaton's, the Hudson's Bay Company, MacMillan Bloedel, Columbia Cellulose, Woodward's Department Store, and C.N. Rail (40). In addition to the local fundraising campaign that raised over thirty thousand dollars in 1962 (41), Father Rogers eventually obtained financial contributions from several individuals and companies across Canada and the United States, including James Pattison, Finning Tractors (\$2000), Canada Safeway (\$5000), R.C.A. Victor (\$350) (42), Imperial Tobacco (\$5000), Walter Koerner (\$12,000), the diocese of Dallas-Fort Worth (\$1850) (43), Texaco Oil (\$2500), Molson's Brewery (\$5000), Bank of Montreal (\$25,000), Royal Bank (\$25,000), Consolidated Mining and Smelting (\$12,000), and Coca-Cola (44). Such sponsorship indicates the Church's success in "selling" a vision of a northern "integrated" school that was very reminiscent of an older colonialist mindset that had changed very little since the nineteenth century.

Throughout the campaign, O'Grady's greatest challenge was to inform eastern and southern Canadians about the region - its history and geography. These were at once both the greatest hindrances and most important assets in

obtaining private donations. Rogers spent a great deal of his time in "conditioning" and laying the "groundwork" for subsequent fundraising campaigns by telling business leaders and parishes about the work of the Oblates in northern British Columbia, including the construction of Prince George College as part of this "grand heritage" (45). He was restricted in eastern Canada by ordinances issued by the Canadian Catholic bishops to limit fundraising activities to the metropolitan areas of Toronto and Montreal. This distributed charitable donations across North America by the Oblate authorities.

Central to the process of "conditioning the capital" was Kay Cronin's 1959 account of the history of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in British Columbia. Commissioned by O'Grady, Cronin was an established radio and newspaper journalist from England (46). Written in part to commemorate the one hundred year anniversary of the arrival of the first Oblates to B.C., Cross in the Wilderness attempted to document "a series of stories highlighting the outstanding personalities and events" in B.C.-Oblate history (47). It was written "for the man on the street", not the historian, and promised to be "packed with adventure, humour, and pathos, not unlike the stories constructed by O'Grady when referring to Prince George

College. He did not want a "dull, stodgy history" but one to inspire donors. Certainly he was not looking for a social critique of Catholic work among immigrants and Aboriginal communities. On a number of occasions, Father Rogers invited financial contributions by sending autographed copies of Cross in the Wilderness. Like the accounts of the Jesuit Relations some three hundred years earlier, and like Diefenbaker's "Northern vision" regarding the economic potential of the Canadian North in the 1950s, the stories and legends of these pioneer missionaries encouraged business leaders to make donations in a pattern little changed since Confederation (48). The school's historical context was constructed against this backdrop of "missionary zeal" and "pioneering efforts" that would prove pivotal to the success of such fundraising campaigns (49). One parent, W.A. Hughes, spoke at this time of the "college of the North" and how past "obstacles" were overcome with the help of several Oblates (50). The school now stood as a "monument to courage and determination" (51). He went on to say that

I do know that you, Bishop, are concerned.  
 I do know that like the earlier problems  
 back in 1957 in building this college we  
 now enjoy today, you did overcome them.  
 I know that once you have been appraised  
 that "All is not well in this area" you,  
 and we parents, will go about solving

this problem and it will be solved!  
(52)

One such scheme envisioned by the bishop in the early days included establishing his own diocesan construction and glass companies as well as a cement block factory and a trucking and bulldozing firm. "Domano Ltd" was founded in 1960 "to build mission schools for the children of the diocese, both Indian and white" (53). He also would develop and sell off real estate for a new residential subdivision in Prince George. "College Heights" would become part of the city of Prince George in 1975. Subsequently, the "Heights Land Development Company", under the leadership of Clifford Stringer, sold lots in the city of Prince George through a consortium of fifteen local builders, many in the Catholic community (54). O'Grady responded to questions concerning the vision of the school on a future occasion by reminding these potential financiers and the building consortium that: "The Indians of the diocese, especially needed help and I thought education was the solution to their problems" (55). Here, Aboriginal people were cast as the "helpless children" of a benevolent system with "good intentions." This same article went on to say that "the diocese was a wilderness of far-flung towns and scattered Indian villages and that

missionary trips had to be undertaken "with a dog team in winter and by boat in summer" (56).

Besides fundraising campaigns, construction schemes, and real estate development directly related to the Roman Catholic high school, Fergus O'Grady had a number of other concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. These, too, required both careful financial planning and cultivation of the school's identity, and also an ability to make his way through sometimes unhelpful provincial and federal government legislation. Such challenges included the drive to obtain a charter as a post-secondary degree-granting authority. There was as well the struggle to maintain the Master Tuition Agreement plan between provinces and the Department of Indian Affairs which gave Aboriginal parents the option of sending students to parochial, rather than public schools. A massive, province-wide petitioning of the provincial government, led by the Federation of Independent Schools Association, was a third challenge. It pushed for a portion of the funds for education in B.C. to be directed towards "independent" (private) schools.

On Tuesday, March 29, 1966, one challenge was overcome. "Bill 60 - An Act to Incorporate the Prince George College at Prince George" was passed in the provincial legislature (57). The charter provided for the

first two years of university with the potential to "extend to additional years as an academic program is developed in accordance with publicly approved standards" (58). Once again, O'Grady appealed to a sense of the Oblates' "pioneer spirit", commenting in the Kingston Register that the "generosity of spirit and unity" demonstrated by the Oblates and "lay apostles from all over the world" successfully "carved from the forest, swamp, and mud the campus and buildings of what is now Prince George College (59). It had become "the show place of clergy and laity alike" in the region. Almost immediately, O'Grady set about gaining affiliation with a number of Canadian universities so he could "share the federal grant of almost two hundred dollars per college student per year" (60). On May 12, 1960, he had sent an application to the Canadian Universities Foundation, anticipating both the charter and affiliation by several years (61). By 1966, P.G.C. had a number of affiliations, including the University of British Columbia. This meant that after two years of post-secondary education, students could immediately transfer to third-year studies.

At the same time, this time with the assistance of Father John Vincent O'Reilly, an Oblate member working in northern B.C., Bishop O'Grady was petitioning Ottawa,

attempting to speak on the behalf of Aboriginal communities to maintain the current allowance for Indian parents who selected parochial rather than public schooling for their children (62). Trudeau's infamous white paper policy had called for an end to the Indian Act and Aboriginal people's special status in Canada (63). Canadian churches, often working together with Aboriginal leaders and assuming their "traditional" role as intermediaries between the Crown (or Ottawa) and the Indians, challenged the federal government to maintain the financial grants established under the Master Tuition Agreement that had been set in place shortly after the Second World War (64). It is important to note that the "M.T.A." allowed Catholic educational institutions to operate. Without this funding, Oblate activities in general would have come to an end and their "mission" to the Aboriginal communities terminated. It was in the Oblates' best interests to encourage Ottawa and Aboriginal communities to continue to support this tuition arrangement.

Both a financial benefit and an integral part of the "missionary" and "northern" identity of Prince George College, the agreement allowed for parochial education "in accordance with the wishes of their [Indian children's] parents. As a financial benefit to the diocese there was a

continuation of funds granted for "operating and capital expenses necessarily incurred in providing education for Indian children" (65). The tuition fees would be paid by the Department of Indian Affairs on a quarterly basis, at \$533 per year, per Indian student, starting in September, 1968, for fifteen years (66). In addition, funds "deemed necessary for proper integration" would be available, including constructing new buildings. Neither Ottawa nor the D.I.A. would interfere with the "supervision of teaching personnel, administration of the school, the curriculum, or the methods of instruction." These would be the responsibilities of the school authorities (67). This lack of checks and balances allowed O'Grady's enterprise to continue virtually unchallenged for thirty years despite the apparent failure of "integration" at Prince George College.

Thus, the presence of Aboriginal students at Prince George College as well as the financial security of the entire institution was ensured for at least fifteen years. The 1970s saw at the local level, efforts aimed at cultivating the Aboriginal identity of the school - as constructed by the white community. These included a visit by Jay Silverheels, an Ontario-born, Cree and "Tonto" from

the popular American television series, The Lone Ranger, to open the new school library in 1973 (68).

The third and final financial challenge for O'Grady concerned provincial funding of independent schools. Under the direction provided by the Federation of Independent Schools Association, Bill 33, the "Independent Schools Support Act", was passed in Victoria in 1977 (69). An association of a number of denominational school groups, F.I.S.A. included Roman Catholics, Anglicans, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, Lutherans, and Jews (70). While the issue was one of the state funding denominational schools, the association successfully refashioned it as an issue of minority rights in British Columbia, a method employed by O'Grady on a number of occasions after 1957 (71).

This campaign at public and state funding was led in Prince George by the Executive Director of the Catholic Public Schools Society of Prince George Diocese, Michael Van Adrichem. Local lobbying centered upon constructing the various diocesan educational institutions as part of the global outreach of the Catholic Church, highlighting the Canadian story of "educating Indian and Eskimo children", and emphasizing the long "saga" of Oblate priests and the Sisters of St. Ann in the missionary field in the Pacific

Northwest (72). These images were used to secure state funding. This funding gave the public legitimization the bishop wanted. With no apparent Aboriginal participation in this process O'Grady successfully cultivated these perceptions of Prince George College, actually constructing them while also claiming to hold firm to his beliefs that the school was in fact setting out on a bold venture to deliver a particular kind of education to Catholics, Aboriginals, and northerners in British Columbia.

What O'Grady and the early leaders had set out to do was obtain necessary financial resources in the form of donations, grants, and subsidies. These ambitions were predicated on notions of religious, cultural, and spiritual superiority. The denominational nature of the school appealed to Catholics and other Christians who generously opened their pocketbooks to the energetic cleric. Business leaders gladly supported efforts at developing the human resources of northern B.C. in an enterprise that would educate, civilize, assimilate, socialize, and eventually employ northern workers. And finally, Catholic donors across North America continued to find the entire nineteenth-century missionary enterprise a worthy endeavor as it converted the Aboriginals of the region and lead them, purportedly, to "better lives."

CHAPTER TWO,

Parent Support and Staffing Needs  
at Prince George College.

1956 - 1993

The second element central to O'Grady's vision for Prince George College was the establishment of the lay volunteer force called "Frontier Apostles" who would offset further financial difficulties by freely offering their services as teachers, houseparents, administrators, and other school personnel. In response to parental demands for Catholic education, the presence of these volunteers at P.G.C. would aid substantially in the school's construction and development for over thirty years.

Efforts aimed at developing potential connections to Catholic families in the city of Prince George lead to several "fundraising campaigns", often professionally organized and informally supported by word of mouth at the local parish level. Perhaps nowhere more so than in the parish would parents first hear of Prince George College and often make the decision to send their children there either as first-time supporters of the Prince George Catholic School System or as a continuation of their parochial elementary-level education. This process of encouraging Catholic families in the city differed from schemes used with Aboriginal parents elsewhere. Those efforts often relied on informed connections with visiting missionary priests to the reservations, the reality of Aboriginal failure in state-run public schools and the

bishop's insistence that it was the moral obligation of Native Catholics to send their children and adolescents to the closest Catholic school. When Lejac Indian Residential School finally closed in the early 1970s due to falling enrollment occasioned by First Nations' unhappiness with its programs, this made Prince George College the only secondary school option available to Roman Catholic Aboriginal parents in northern B.C. (1).

Among Catholic white families, however, these fundraising campaigns served not only to acquire needed donations, but also to construct the bishop's ambitious "vision" for Prince George College. In 1983, for example, Bishop O'Grady appealed to Catholic parents using images of a "rapidly changing world" that required well-informed and spiritually-prepared youth:

Education today is confronted with new problems. New innovations require new teaching methods and courses. Prince George College is well into an era of rapid growth in students. These students need important academic facilities. Prince George College has a most proud tradition. Hundreds of young people have grown in faith and knowledge at our high school. The Catholic secondary education is most urgently needed in these times of widespread materialism and secularism. I am depending on the good will and unity of you, our Christian family, with full confidence that you will assume responsibility of seeing this most important project through to a

successful conclusion. (2)

Parents were asked to fulfill their sacred duty and to pay the debts of the region's Catholic high school. This took place despite federal subsidies for Aboriginal students, provincial grants for all students, subsidies created by a volunteer workforce, and monthly tuition payments for "day" students that were approximately one quarter of the fees charged to "resident" students who required both room and board (3).

Much can be gleaned from official brochures and correspondence related to publicity campaigns - the most "official" form of dialogue between the Catholic community in Prince George and the high school. The school's Catholic philosophy was often highlighted as the singular distinction from local public school options (4). Much was also made of a purportedly long list of "distinguished alumni" employed as teachers, nurses, attorneys, and labor/business leaders (5). As well, Prince George College prided itself on having some of the largest Aboriginal graduating classes in the nation. From 1962 to 1973, for example, the school successfully graduated one hundred sixteen Native students (6). The Aboriginal "success stories" added to the school's prestige and encouraged

white as well as Aboriginal parents to send their children to the school.

Catholic, non-Aboriginal parents seemed to respond favorably to the bishop's ambitions for Catholic secondary education. Adrien Gerard, parent and chairman of the Prince George College Council, urged fellow parents by suggesting that

As Catholic parents we must educate our children in their faith. We are fortunate in having a Catholic High school, where the Christian values that are learned at home are extended into every aspect of their education.  
(7)

In a city of no more than eighty thousand people the number of families to send their students to Prince George College is remarkable. When the doors of the new campus opened in 1962, 195 students enrolled. By 1973 the enrollment had jumped to 260 and by 1986 the records indicate the second largest student body ever, at 385 (8). This positive response in a city where less than twenty percent was Roman Catholic indicates strong support for Bishop O'Grady's "vision" for Prince George College.

Another feature of his successful campaigns among Catholic families was the range of courses and extra-curricular activities in a relatively small high school. School annuals indicate that for its first year in

operation the school facilitated active participation in Student Council, Band, school dances, Art Club, Chess, basketball, an Aboriginal group called "Donovos", and a religious group called "Sodality of Our Lady" (9). In its core curriculum P.G.C. offered courses as prescribed by the B.C. Ministry of Education in both the Humanities and Sciences, accompanied by a surprisingly long list of elective choices including French, Carrier, Home Economics, Art, Commerce, Industrial Education, Construction, Accounting, General Business, Textiles, Child Care, Community Recreation, Drafting, Computer Science, and Consumer Mathematics (10).

Religious Studies was also required of every student at each grade level. By the late 1980s, towards the end of Bishop O'Grady's administration, religious retreats were also held at each grade level every year. The Catholic Mass was celebrated twice per week at lunch hour in a small chapel and at least once per month for the entire school.

A full range of Physical Education programs also utilized one gymnasium and a large campus with fields, tracks, and an ice rink. Several basketball teams won championships at both the regional and provincial levels. The school's extra-curricular athletic program was remarkably successful despite low enrollment relative to

other city and provincial secondary schools (11). As well, a theater program initiated by volunteers from the United Kingdom staged many successful drama festivals and productions. This impressive range of curricular and extra-curricular offerings made Prince George College an attractive option to the city's youth and ultimately to their parents. Tuition costs were also kept to a minimum - never exceeding one thousand dollars per year up to 1980.

Central to Bishop O'Grady's "vision" for P.G.C. were his efforts to obtain the services of young Catholic volunteers. In a 1996 interview, he referred to the "Frontier Apostles" as the "highlight and apex" of his work in Prince George. Certainly, this "movement" remains among his greatest legacies to the development of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest and education in particular. The public perception of both the diocese and the school in particular was of missionary territory requiring the assistance of brave, young people willing to devote time and energy to the Western Canadian "frontier" where the diocese had insufficient Catholics to support its parishes and schools (12). Of course, such heroic language is deeply problematic from a First Nations perspective. As well, its highly gendered nature essentially demanded young women as nurses and elementary teachers while young men

were encouraged to participate as high school teachers, bus drivers, mechanics, and maintenance personnel. Once again, images of a vast, untamed geography and the legendary service of Oblate pioneers among both Aborigines and Europeans were carefully managed. The Western Catholic Reporter said that

Most important of all is his [O'Grady's] creation of a new spirit, expressed through a practical organization which allows lay people to use their talents solely in the service of other people. For twenty-five dollars a month they come from the U.S., Europe, and as far as Australia to teach school, be nurses, secretaries, craftsmen, and laborers.  
(13)

These Frontier Apostles were central both to the economic viability of Prince George College and to its identity as an "integrated" high school.

These "F.A.s" were part of Prince George College, but also had a wider, diocesan identity. They worked throughout northern B.C. and staffed over a dozen educational institutions. According to one recruiter, Father Gerard Clenaghan, regardless of where they were sent by the Chancery Office, they were interested in a "challenge to their abilities" (14). One volunteer said that, "When we're there working, the question of how much money we're making a month is the very last question in our

heads" (15). A Canadian volunteer echoed similar sentiments: "The only way I can find out who 'me' is, is by trying to give of myself to others" (16). In the small city of Prince George, the F.A.s assumed a distinct character in the community. For example their staff manual stated that because of their active involvement in the civic and social life of the city Frontier Apostles are readily recognized despite all attempts at anonymity" (17).

In essence, O'Grady recruited people based on a familiar set of images of the region and its inhabitants. Over time there developed a reputation for the Frontier Apostles as legendary and singular not only as the school itself, but also as Bishop O'Grady. This process resulted in a further cultivation of the school's identity as a "frontier school." As stated earlier, part of this identity was the role the organization played in the bishop's vision of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Archbishop Sergio Pignedoli, Secretary of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, said that the Vatican "looked upon the British Columbia experiment as a testing ground for ideas of Vatican II" (18). Still other reports suggested that O'Grady saw his experiment in social, lay voluntarism as revolutionary because it had preceded John

F. Kennedy's formation of the Peace Corps - also a social, volunteer force - by a number of years (19).

Like the "popular appeal of the missionary life" of the nineteenth century, the Frontier Apostolate attracted zealous young male and female Christians (20). They demonstrated a spirit of evangelization as well as an eagerness to travel, to explore the Canadian West, to develop social networks, and possibly to settle in Canada after having given a year or two years of service. Many young marriages sprung from working relationships in the school system. It is difficult using only the diocesan archives to evaluate all of the many reasons young people decided to become Frontier Apostles. In some accounts, volunteers, nevertheless, made it clear that part of their desire to come to Prince George was to find a Catholic husband or wife (21). Nevertheless, recruits - over 4,000 over thirty-five years (22) - who became "modern day missionaries" (23) and "backwoods peace corps" (24) loved their work as "missionaries" on the "new frontier" of Catholic evangelization in the twentieth century.

Publicity campaigns in both municipal and national newspapers across the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada contained numerous references to the region using a missionary-colonialist construct, but rarely

included reference to the majority of white families in the region. Twentieth-century Prince George was hardly a nineteenth-century missionary landscape. For example, the Los Angeles Times described Bishop O'Grady as "often in a fringed Indian jacket and mukluks" (25). It reminded readers that the diocese was "adjacent to Alaska and runs freely from the Pacific to Alberta!" An article in the newspaper of the archdiocese of Seattle highlighted "the problems of the poor, almost-destitute Indians of northern British Columbia" (26). No reference was made to the history of exploitation that caused this destitution. One account from the Glasgow Observer referred to the need to "help the Indian population in the area" of whom there are "about five or six different tribes, the predominant tribe being the Western Danes [sic]" (27). In time, campaigns claimed to recruit the largest group of lay mission helpers anywhere in the world (28).

The Frontier Apostles contributed greatly to the development of the school. Male and female volunteers, eager to join the organization, gave a great deal as teachers, nurses, secretaries, cooks, bus drivers, carpenters, sheet metal workers, electricians, child care workers, plumbers, engineers, janitors, catechists, and social workers. In addition, many F.A.s became "house

parents" for Aboriginal students who took up residence on the school's campus over thirty years. While their first members came from Ireland, succeeding waves arrived from across the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, India, the Philippines, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, and Egypt. By the early 1990s they totaled over four thousand (29). Numbers usually averaged approximately 150 each year from 1956 to 1993 with most staying for two years. Volunteers had to be at least twenty years old and obtain pastoral and professional character testimonials. Of the average 150 who came each year over a third would be employed at Prince George College.

The bishop circumvented federal immigration legislation that required non-citizens to have Landed Immigrant status. Recruits were given only a small stipend (usually \$25/month in the early 1960s) and room and board allowances (30). The length of this commitment was usually a minimum of two years, but many remained much longer and would acquire Canadian citizenship. Many volunteers have become leaders in the province's Catholic community. What is unclear is the overall percentage of such volunteers working at Prince George College as opposed to other Catholic schools or hospitals in the region. Very

few priests, brothers, and nuns ever worked at the school as compared to these volunteers. From 1962 to 1993 the staff was almost entirely comprised of Frontier Apostles (31).

Upon arriving in Prince George, the Frontier Apostles were often given some background to the region and the local people, but hardly enough to encourage proper integration in the classrooms and hallways. The "heroic" and "brave" context of their work in terms of the history of the earlier services of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of St. Ann was portrayed as "pioneering" and often "difficult" work. Again, the colonialist view that the region was only wilderness and inhabited by "primitive" Aboriginal people was demonstrated.

Suggestions for reading provided by the Office of the Frontier Apostolate included Kay Cronin's Cross in the Wilderness, Father A.G. Morice's History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia, and Margaret Craven's I Heard the Owl Call My Name about a young priest who was sent to a remote village along B.C.'s coast to work within an Aboriginal community. The F.A. manual said this novel "displays a rare white understanding of the Indian people that should please even Indians" and successfully documents "a disintegrating culture where the old tribal ways are

dying" (32). This supposedly presented a favorable approach to the Indians that young volunteers might adopt:

As a priest I was especially interested in the young priest's approach. The writer could have sinned, as is so often the case, by creating the sanctimonious cleric who always gives religion a bad name. Instead, Mark Brian avoids sentimentality and unrealistic ideas about the Indian. Neither does he try to "become Indian."  
(33)

From the outset an approach of "benevolent paternalism" was encouraged among new recruits to Prince George College.

What these young immigrants found upon arriving varied from school to school in the diocese. Little documentation is available to assess their first impressions. Many would be asked to work at Prince George College as the center of O'Grady's educational efforts and the largest, best-equipped educational facility in the region. It was also the only initiative whose mandate served all the citizens of the diocese - both Aboriginal and white - rather than one parish or set of parishes. In this sense, the school was always a diocesan or regional school rather than strictly "parochial." The challenges, however, of being "frontier" workers, even in Prince George, were evident. As one brochure claimed:

Roads were bad, there was no running water or electricity in many missions and travel or the modern day wonder

of the television were many dreams away. (34)

And again, as part of the prevailing ethos at the school, these modern-day missionaries were seen as "rugged individualists with generous hearts; adventurous minds and pioneering spirits" (35). They were looked at as the next wave of Catholic workers in northern B.C., succeeding first the Oblates, and then the Sisters of St. Ann, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Sisters of Mercy, the Fransiscan Sisters, and the Sisters of Charity of Providence (36).

As enrollment at P.G.C. increased steadily and the hub city developed into a modern center for regional business and political administration, the need continued to grow for these lay volunteers to administer and teach in the schools of the diocese. Under the initial leadership of Father Lawrence Clenaghan, another local Oblate, recruiters traveled "the world over as ambassadors of Bishop O'Grady and his work" (37). By the time the Frontier Apostles folded, O'Grady proudly boasted that the "movement gave the laity an opportunity to assist in the evangelization of our people" at a time when "it was needed most and at the same time gave inspiration to those they touched" (38).

The Frontier Apostles ended in 1993 for several reasons. By 1989, provincial funding of independent

schools had increased from thirty-five to fifty percent with the stipulation that funds be directed to operating costs, not capital expenses. Most of the new funds went to salaries. This was immediately reflected in a drop in the number of volunteers required. As well, it became more difficult to recruit workers to Canada in the 1980s as the country was "not perceived to be a nation of starvation and persecution" and so the mantle of "modern-day missionary" was handed over to volunteers working in countries in Africa and Latin America. Even by 1985, the lay principal, J.A. Earle, abandoned the use of the "Frontier Apostle" label for the more practical "College Volunteer" to gain a new bargaining position with regard to ending the use of such volunteers at the College and replacing them with "Salaried" teachers. In a memo directed to his staff, Earle saw these final days of the movement at Prince George College as the elimination of the "inequalities and injustices in past practices as the College's financial resources permit" (39). Clearly, a new era had emerged at Prince George College that disregarded the school's earliest and most recognizable identity as an Oblate high school employing a large, dedicated force of international volunteers.

Over the school's first thirty-five years, F.A.'s contributions would be immense and vital to the delivery of Catholic education. O'Grady preceded not only Kennedy's Peace Corps, but also Pope Paul's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity which outlined a more active participation by lay people. Together with the support garnered from hundreds of Catholic parents, the diocese of Prince George had become synonymous with pioneering efforts to produce Catholic education in the north.

As a consequence of the parental support and lay voluntarism that O'Grady successfully managed for thirty years, the doors of the school remained open. Much of the capital required to keep the institution alive came only from government grants and subsidies as well as generous community support and the savings of utilizing a large volunteer work force. The Frontier Apostles, in particular, were not only a financial benefit to the education of Catholic youth in northern B.C., but also a very successful volunteer movement unprecedented in its day. Bishop O'Grady's most publicized legacy to Catholicism in the Canadian West would not be his twenty years administering federal policies at residential schools or his term as Provincial of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Instead, bolstered by the carefully managed

support of Catholic families, the Frontier Apostolate remains a remarkable achievement that, together with subsidies from the federal government, made Prince George College a reality and gave the school a unique identity in the region.

CHAPTER THREE

Manipulating Images of the  
Dakel'h and Wet'su'weten:

The Appearance of Integration  
at Prince George College.

1956 - 1989

The third and final element central to O'Grady's vision of Prince George College was the school's "integrated" identity as constructed, manipulated, and praised by Bishop O'Grady himself. Through examination of the Catholic missionary enterprise in British Columbia the construction of Prince George College is set against a picture of paternalism, ethnocentrism, and missionary zeal. Like the missionary ethos that spurred public and private funds and the support provided by Catholic families and lay volunteers, Native students were critical to the identity of Prince George College.

At varying periods in the school's history and often to gain financial support or government backing - the "Aboriginal identity" of Prince George College and O'Grady's embrace, at least theoretically, of an "integrated" or "joint" educational plan were central to his "vision" of the school. These images were successfully manipulated not only to convince Aboriginal parents, but also to build and maintain the school for both Aboriginal and white students. Unlike Lejac and the residential school model of coercive assimilation, Aboriginal parents chose to send their young people after careful persuasion and a one-hundred year history of contact with Oblates in the region. This aspect of O'Grady's "vision" must also be

evaluated in the context of another story, of the significant abuse of Aboriginal youth at the hands of lay and religious people as well as a carefully planned program to eliminate the students' sense of Aboriginal identity. For all intents and purposes the "integrated" approach was merely a "modification of the traditional assimilative, oppressive policy" marked by continued federal parsimony and an ideological commitment to "liquidate Canada's Indian problem." Ultimately it was a ploy to get Natives to pay for white education (1).

O'Grady and his Oblate colleagues may have intended Prince George College to serve the "best interests" of local Aboriginal people. This clearly was not the case. The mission to the First Nations communities had always been part of the Oblate mandate in North America. Father O'Reilly, a leading Oblate in the region, spoke of the "contribution the churches had made towards Indian education in British Columbia from the time of Confederation." O'Grady, like O'Reilly, saw Prince George College as part of this contribution. It was the only Roman Catholic secondary school in the North and integrated, post-secondary institution in the province "in which the children learn side by side with their non-Indian counterparts" (2).

In approaching the school's "integrated" identity it is useful to examine images applied specifically to Aboriginal people of the region by local clergy and the school's administration - images and attitudes central to O'Grady's vision. Consistent with its mandate to evangelize the poor, the Oblate community usually saw its traditional role in B.C. as related to "the distinct position of the Indian, Eskimo, and Metis people" whose current "human condition is a special appeal to the Christian conscience of the Canadian Church" (3).

This call to work with "the first occupants of this country" was re-affirmed by the Oblates in 1971 as a vocation among "the ones who proclaim most tragically their thirst for liberation and their hunger for salvation, their desire for respect and love. They [the Aboriginal inhabitants] are the victims most vitally stricken by the selfishness of man." Much of this particular narrative is borrowed from Latin American Liberation Theology and ultimately has biblical overtones related to the "liberation" of slaves in exile and "sinners in darkness." Having said this, however, there is little evidence that O'Grady himself adhered specifically to "a theology of liberation" in his "vision" for Prince George College.

That Bishop O'Grady was moved by the "seemingly hopeless" plight of the Aboriginal people of northern British Columbia, however, is clear. His own experiences working in several Western Canadian residential schools must have shaped, at least in part, his sentiments. Three decades of residential school administration inclined him to support the closure of residential schools. In this regard, O'Grady seemed to ignore prevailing Oblate sentiment that wanted the continuation of Indian residential schools across Canada (4).

In 1961, the bishop's publicity director, Father Peter Rogers, petitioned potential donors to assist in constructing a "combined Indian-white college" because

Your heart would bleed if you could see the conditions of some of the Indians, especially the half-breeds . . . To help the Indian gain his rightful position in society, a society that has too often snubbed him and cast him out, the Oblates knew that the secret was education. Indian boy and girl graduates of these schools are now mingling with whites without the fear - that terrible, haunting dread - that they are misfits or out of place. (5)

Continuing with this theme of clerical paternalism Rogers and O'Grady made plans to produce a short publicity film about a young fictional Indian named "Peter Stanley" to increase financial support for the school. There is no evidence that the film was ever produced. It would have,

however, started with the sound of "Indian drums in the background." A narrative accompanying footage of the Aboriginal man and his village spoke of "the men who wore the golden cross" who came to assist the youth in their "plight" by education:

A new dawn began to appear across northern and central British Columbia. Just as one hundred years ago the ones who were first to help the Indian were black-robed missionaries so again, now their new Bishop, Fergus O'Grady, began a new program designed to help the Indian get ahead. Residential schools were an answer: but not the complete and totally satisfactory answer to help solve the dilemma. A quick look around his vast vicariate showed much poverty, a great deal of ignorance - frontier drinking, brawling, and murder. There was a big job to do and Bishop O'Grady was the man to do it!

(6)

Such paternalistic imagery was familiar. O'Grady's role as missionary among the Aboriginal peoples and P.G.C. was central to this process of "beneficial assimilation." Contemporary government documents - the Hawthorne report (1969) for example - also gave a "dated and stereotyped, middle-class view" of the Canadian Indian while at the same time claiming to speak out of genuine concern for Aboriginal Canadians. This Report advocated continued "integration" in Canadian classrooms. Reflecting the attitude expressed in this discourse and one held by Bishop

O'Grady, a memo to teachers of Indian students at P.G.C. spoke of "Indian and Non-Indian factors to assist teachers in the classroom. These included differences of food, clothing ("obtained from poor quality bargain sales"), objects, attitudes towards children ("He has limited stimulation and feedback from adults"), lack of parental interest in learning, verbal practice and development, routines for learning, sanctions for learning ("Time is not a factor - he can take all morning to get dressed if he needs it"), discipline (both "protective and loose"), and economic involvement in their children's lives (7).

Employing a language that referred to "the primitive inhabitants of this country" and the "benefits emanating from our Christian and democratic civilization", O'Grady and the Oblates emphasized their concern for "the spiritual and the material welfare" of the Aboriginal people of the Prince George region (8). The contradictions and misperceptions in this memo were not always evident to the teachers or clergy of the times. "Integration" was the solution to this "Indian problem" as it aimed "directly at spiritual welfare, knowledge of the true God, respect for authority, and to become acquainted with the essential features of citizenship (9). No where was there interest in sharing Dakelh culture and society with white students.

It seems that the white community was acting out of "paternalistic pity" that often placed whites at the center of the moral universe.

The Dakel'h and Wet'suwet'en communities of this region were familiar to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. First recorded contact occurred early in the 1840s. Following this initial encounter missions among the "Carrier" were set up along the shores of Stuart Lake, the Nechako River, Fraser River, Babine Lake, Fraser Lake, Burns Lake, and the Bulkley River (10). The entire region belonging to various groups of Dakel'h and Wet'su'weten stretched from the Coast Mountains to the Rockies and from Takla Lake in the north to the Chilcotin Plateau in the south (11). Elizabeth Furniss has explained how northern, central, and southern communities varied in dialect, political organization, and social structure. Many early missionaries were not aware of this complexity and used the generic "Indian" label for all local nations and cultural groups. This ignorance continued at Prince George College. In fact, all tribes were members of the Northern Athapaskan linguistic family that also included the Chilcotin, Navaho, Apache, Sekani, Tahtlan, Kaska, Slave, and Beaver (12). In 1970, the Department of Indian Affairs reported seventy reservations in the vicinity of Prince George including

fifteen at Williams Lake, nine at Stuart Lake, four near Fort Saint John, four at Burns Lake, and eight in the Babine Lake region. All would at some time send young people to Prince George College (13). In 1963 Prince George College enrollment figures documented the presence of Aboriginal students from throughout the province: Prince George, Prince Rupert, Kemano, Telkwa, New Hazelton, Moricetown, Hanceville, Fort Saint James, Fort Saint John, Lejac, Peace River, MacLeod Lake, Vanderhoof, Williams Lake, Revelstoke, Fraser Lake, Burns Lake, Kitimat, Alexis Creek, Smithers, Kimberley, Ashcroft, Terrace, Stuart Lake, Dawson Creek, Quesnel, McBride, and Vancouver (14). Over the course of thirty years bands ranged in distance from Fort Ware in the north to Williams Lake and even Vancouver in the south. Aboriginal enrollment varied. Numbers ranged from as little as fifty-four students in the school's opening year to 1986 when resident students numbered 142 (approximately fifty percent) - the highest in the college's history (15).

O'Grady seems to have enjoyed a place of privilege in many Aboriginal communities throughout B.C. and his persona was often partly responsible for the presence of Aboriginal youth at the school. Certainly the long history of

exchanges between Oblates and the Dakel'h and Wet'su'weten was also a contributing factor.

My recollections of Bishop O'Grady include him being surrounded by First Nations and white young people and enjoying their company in an informal way. He often said that this association kept him feeling young. On several occasions I can remember seeing Bishop O'Grady in "buckskin vestments" instead of the usual cloth material worn during the celebration of the Catholic Mass. He often told the story of how local Carrier women had made the garment from deer shot by their husbands. He would wear this clothing with pride at the local Catholic summer camp on Stuart Lake - "Camp Morice" - and recall stories of eating "smoked salmon", "bannock", and "moose meat" and of caring deeply for the "Indian people." As a child at the time I was often amazed at these stories and intrigued when he was accompanied by Carrier elders from around Stuart Lake who had assisted the Oblates in building the summer camp. It never occurred to me at the time but, despite the efforts at "integration", I cannot remember any Carrier children at Camp Morice each summer! These material items were visible signs of "cooperation" and "respect", as O'Grady saw it, between Oblates and the Dakel'h and Wet'su'weten. In retrospect, they were token items of material culture that

signified something much more complex than cooperation and respect.

Likewise, at his funeral in 1998 at St. Augustine's Church in Vancouver, members of the Secwepemc from Kamloops paid him special respect with prayers and songs and honoured his casket with a laying on of hands and sweet grass incense. In a letter to O'Grady in 1983, the elders of the Stoney Creek Indian band wrote:

Your excellency, the Catholic Church and the Indian people have been one and the same since 1870 when the first missionaries came to live with us. The only education that our people have benefited from has been provided by the Church. In these times of new promises by the government, it is most important that we all renew our commitments to each other as Catholics and as Indian people as we cannot separate our spirituality from our education or our political organization.  
(16)

Clearly this relationship between O'Grady and the local First Nations was complex. Jo-Ann Fiske has documented part of the story of cooperation between the Carrier and the Oblate community in a number of articles (17). The Church was often regarded as the lesser of several evils by Aboriginal communities. This was not lost on the Oblates who must have known that this relationship, however

problematic, ensured the existence of the denominational school system.

What exactly was the nature of this education offered Aboriginal people at Prince George College? In his presentation to the Parliamentary Committee (1970), Father O'Reilly, diocesan representative, explained:

Our Catholic people realized the great advantage to both peoples if our Indian people were to be educated side by side in the same schools as the non-Indian children of the same area.

(18)

Father MacNeil, principal of P.G.C. in 1973, shared this sentiment:

About half the College enrollment is Indian students, many from as far away as Prince Rupert. The presence of the two cultures gives the College a unique opportunity to develop a sense of community, by "rubbing shoulders."

(19)

In one letter to Bishop O'Grady, Mrs. Mary John, an Aboriginal leader from Vanderhoof, made reference to the benefits of this particular type of "integration" over local public schools by adding that

there goes our free choice [if Ottawa refuses to maintain the Master Tuition Agreement]. The only high school we have in Vanderhoof is the public one and we have not done well there!

(20)

Certainly it was no secret that many Aboriginal students did not fare well in public schools. So Mrs. John's sentiments reflected that history. O'Grady, however, saw the great potential of these "integrated" schools for Aboriginal students. The fact that P.G.C. also had college degree-granting abilities by 1965 made the bishop especially proud. He often repeated that "the most pressing need of B.C. Indians today is higher education in joint, white-Indian high schools." In his correspondence O'Grady made greater use of the term joint rather than "integrated" when referring to Prince George College. Perhaps he sensed the limitations of his own efforts and opted for the "less-problematic" of the two descriptive terms. He would go on to add that "Indians do not lack intelligence! What they have lacked in the past is encouragement and someone to foster initiative at an early stage. There is still a long way to go. You cannot keep them segregated forever" (21). It seems, however, that his solution was to school and house Native students and whites in the same rooms rather than integrate their cultures and lifestyles as a residence program had been established by 1960. This fundamental difference made this version of "integration" not unlike earlier assimilationist policies.

Yet, without ignoring the school's responsibilities and despite many efforts aimed at equality and access to educational resources, pressures beyond the institution itself made Aboriginal success difficult (22). What was missing, however, as earlier studies have indicated, was acceptance of Natives by the white society beyond the walls of a joint institution. Federal parsimony and larger societal discrimination beyond the control of the institution limited chances for success (23).

Aboriginal parents continued to send their young people to "O'Grady's school." In an address to the staff at Prince George College in 1968, Nick Prince, chief of the Necoslie band at Fort Saint James, said, "It is good to see integration of our children here" (24). In an interview with Margaret Moore, diocesan archivist, in 1993, O'Grady outlined his plans for the "integrated" school:

And then I went to the government because the government pays for natives wherever they go to school and the government said if you get the agreement from the natives to attend a local Catholic school, we will pay the tuition. And if half the enrolment is native, we will pay half the cost of the construction of the building plus the land and everything else!

(25)

Throughout this period, O'Grady successfully negotiated with Ottawa over partial funding of the land and

construction costs as well as tuition for Aboriginal students while at the same time conditioning corporate sponsors with tales of Oblate struggles and Indian suffering in northern British Columbia. It amounted to no less than Aboriginal and volunteer subsidization of Catholic education in northern B.C. for thirty years. In his personal correspondence O'Grady described plans made to have male students work at a church-owned mill and learn useful technical trades including home construction, perhaps not unlike the pattern of education and labor at Oblate-run residential schools such as Lejac described by Jo-Anne Fiske. Like earlier residential school models, girls would be trained to become housewives and homemakers. Another debate centered on whether the goals of this "integration" would best be served by building hostels or private dwellings. In the end, however, "small hostel units were constructed" as an "ideal home atmosphere which would best serve the purposes of integration" (26).

By 1960, financial contributions from the Indian Commissioner arrived with the agreement that the diocese "shall complete the construction of a high school with eight classrooms, science labs, music room, library, gymnasium-auditorium, industrial arts shops, home economics room, cafeteria, administration offices, and nine hostel

units." As well, the diocese "shall ensure that there will be no segregation in the school on account of race or color" (27). The response was "mixed" classrooms.

Soon, however, "integration" would mean more than simply a matter of housing arrangements and "rubbing shoulders" in the classroom. It would, however, never attain the fully "integrated" environment implied by the term. By the mid 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a number of organizations, curriculum options, clubs, and even an "Indian Institute" would materialize. This Institute, certified in 1969 under the Canadian Societies Act (No. 8518) aimed at providing Catholic-Aboriginal leadership training and opportunities in British Columbia.

These initiatives responded not only to the integrated mandate of the school, but also to rising political and social pressure surrounding the Master Tuition Agreement plan in 1968 and 1969. This in turn led to further discussions between Ottawa and the National Indian Brotherhood from 1969 to 1972 and the release of the policy document "Indian Control of Indian Education."

The Master Tuition Agreement (M.T.A.) was an agreement between the provincial and federal government whereby the province was reimbursed by the federal government for the cost of status Indian children's education. In some cases,

as with the Catholic schools in the diocese of Prince George, the fee was paid by the D.I.A. until 1976 when it was then paid by individual bands (28). Likewise, pressure by local bands in this same period helped to ensure that Aboriginal families had the same access to parochial schools as white students. A campaign of letter-writing and presentations before the federal government by church and Aboriginal leaders was spearheaded in Prince George by Father O'Reilly.

At the heart of this issue was the Aboriginal identity of Prince George College and the historic link between the Oblates and the Aboriginal people of the region as well as the financial subsidies provided to the Church by the presence of Aboriginal students. Because Ottawa was now channeling tuition and housing costs through the provinces and because B.C. at that time had no policy in place for providing any funds to denominational schools, churches in B.C. were placed in the awkward position of having to renegotiate how money was sent from the Department of Indian Affairs. This negotiation had to take place as an issue of parents' rights to educational choice. Central to these debates was a growing frustration among Aboriginal leaders that decisions were being made in Ottawa and by the churches without the consent of Aboriginal people.

Education was regarded as pivotal. At a conference of regional band leaders in 1978, parents voiced their concern that Indians be given "the right to choose whether their children attend a reserve, residential, or public school" (29). They also wanted the power to "approve or disprove any further changes to the Indian Act" before, not after, they were passed by the federal government (30).

Letters were to be sent to Ottawa to push the federal government for local self-determination in education. Naturally, this self-determination also benefited Oblate educational endeavors across Canada. One such anonymous note from the local newspaper stated that "We're satisfied with the parochial system. We know a good thing when we have it." The letter continued:

I suppose the federal [sic] will try and get rid of the parochial schools so we won't have a chance to use our free choice. B.C. is a tough place to be an Indian in, tougher still to be a Catholic Indian. for the last one hundred years the only people interested in the Indians were the priests and nuns. They were good enough for us, they will still be good enough for us the next one hundred years. We thank God for their being interested in us and the education of our children.  
(31)

The Roman Catholic bishops of B.C. also voiced their concerns to Ottawa, particularly their fears that the provincial premier would never permit funds to be directed

to Indian students attending denominational schools when a similar arrangement for white students in B.C. did not exist (32). The resolution of the Master Tuition Agreement problems may very well have paved the way for the acceleration of the campaign for state funding of parochial schools and its eventual success by 1978.

In 1970 this crisis was over. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jean Chretien, wrote to the local Member of Parliament, Robert Borrie, saying:

Where parents from the area wish to send their children to Prince George College on religious grounds, they should be able to do so, although this will mean some students boarding out who are presently attending school from home.

(33)

By the late 1980s the federal government would retreat from this commitment to Aboriginal families, claiming financial restraint. But for the time being O'Reilly had successfully masterminded the letter-writing campaign safeguarding of the "joint contracts" made in B.C. with church authorities. He made special reference in a memo to local priests. They were to get Aboriginal children and youth to write

in their broken English [which] is far more effective than bishops or

priests. We can work behind the scenes on negotiations, but we can only do so if the federal government knows there is a good bulk of the Indians who want to come to our schools.

(34)

Later, he would also remind federal authorities that little acknowledgment had ever been given Bishop O'Grady, "the grand-daddy of integration" who had been championing the cause of integrated education before the Hawthorne report had been published by establishing Kamloops Indian School in the 1940s. O'Reilly was staking claim to a "proud" Oblate tradition but he was not successful, however, in convincing society at large that the Oblates, and Prince George College in particular, were fully committed to integration as opposed to merely housing and schooling the two "groups" within the same buildings. The Hawthorne report, besides challenging Indian parents' rights to choose schools, also charged the Oblates with paternalism and arrogance. And while O'Reilly admitted that not all possible was done to promote cultural pride and awareness among Aboriginal youth, he would not concede that this should mean an abandonment of integration policies by the Oblates (35).

O'Reilly's sentiment seems to encapsulate Oblate opinions throughout most of the life of Prince George

College. The school set about attempting to revive its identity as an "integrated" institution in the form of curriculum options and remedial programs as well as sanctioning a number of cultural pride associations such that would give the appearance of a type of "integration" in the school. This culminated in the establishment of an "Institute of Indian Culture in British Columbia" on September 22, 1969.

It suffered years of setbacks because the school's administration was unable to find and hire qualified instructors in several subject areas (36). Continued discrimination made university an unattractive option to many Aboriginal people and this often meant a lack of trained professionals from the First Nations' community. In August 1972, the principal of P.G.C. had canvassed all of the local reservations "without learning of anyone qualified to teach an Indian culture course" (37). This Institute had been O'Grady's particular response to criticism in the Hawthorne report and growing dissatisfaction with limited integration. Another such example of a change in practice was a "Native Studies" program in the school's calendar. By 1979, it included Carrier language classes with additional units on the Carrier calendar, local history, legends and myths,

potlatching and clan system organization, local "family trees", and discussion of the recent James Bay Land Settlement (38).

The Allied Indian Chiefs of Northern British Columbia urged P.G.C. to establish this "Research Institute" for Aboriginal adults and youth to "discuss the various aspects of Indian life, education, and culture" (39). Shortly thereafter, the Federation of Independent Schools Association organized a committee to investigate. During a meeting of this committee O'Reilly stated that "Every effort would be made to meet this request" (40). O'Grady later concurred at a diocesan conference, stating that "Through the [institute], we hope to preserve their crafts and traditions, and we hope to bring in sociologists to document their way of life" (41). The Carrier language programs in 1980 do not seem to have been offered through this Institute. Unable to hire suitable instructors once again the Institute closed before it ever actually started (42).

As if to boost the Aboriginal identity of Prince George College after the abysmal failure of the Indian Institute, O'Grady managed to stage a public relations coup that won him national and international recognition (43). On May 31, 1973, a new library wing was completed at the

school. It was officially opened by Fergus O'Grady and Jay Silverheels, "Tonto" from the popular television series The Lone Ranger. The Domano Newsletter claimed that he was "a fitting choice for the occasion, a Canadian, a full-blooded Mohawk Indian born on the reservation at Brantford, Ontario" who "epitomized for many a young person the value of setting a goal, working towards that goal, and achieving success against formidable odds" (44). While this event displayed an image beneficial to the school's reputation, the reality of Aboriginal integration was much different.

Much of the publicity the school would receive in the 1970s and early 1980s revolved around efforts by local Aboriginal youth to revive pride in their culture in school associations and clubs. While this was not always but sometimes "integration", it seemed, once again, that it might satisfy the school's administration. For example, the "Thunderbird Program" was conceived about this time by Frontier Apostle staff as a remedial course aimed at having troubled youth "re-enter the regular school system", "improve social skills", "embrace a Christian attitude", and "help create and protect the learning environment of the classroom" (45).

Similarly, the "Donovos Club" was formed by both staff and students in 1962 as "a means whereby the Indian may

help himself to make the changes necessary to live as others do." Clearly this was intended to hasten the pace of cultural assimilation and was predicated on notions of ethnocentrism. The name of the club was made up of the initial letters of a Latin phrase which means "Lord, that we may know ourselves" (46). Here again, "integration" was seen as a series of piecemeal attempts to encourage an Aboriginal identity - as defined by whites - within the school rather than in fact combining and synthesizing many different identities. Its purpose was "to discuss and debate various topics" in order to work "acceptable solutions" to problems facing Aboriginal youth at Prince George College (47). In 1969, for example, in the heated debates between Ottawa and the Aboriginal and church leaders, the Donovos Club petitioned Jean Chretien to "safeguard the right to choose separate or public schools" (48). In this sense, the Donovos Club was certainly a useful tool for O'Grady's "vision" of Prince George College. It gave the appearance of Aboriginal agreement with the "integrated" and denominational nature of the school and rewarded young people who did not criticize the school itself or the work of Catholic missionaries.

In 1978, Ed John, a graduate of Prince George College and spokesman for the Stuart-Trembleur band in Fort Saint

James, reminded O'Grady of the financial benefits enjoyed by the Catholic schools and Prince George College in particular. He pointed out that Aboriginal subsidies were partially sustaining the school, that integration was not in fact taking place and that Aboriginal leaders had little voice in the school's operation. He went on to urge O'Grady to allow greater Native participation in the decision-making regarding educational materials, boarding facilities, staffing choices, policies and decision-making, and funding - perhaps a closer resemblance to what "integration" was supposed to be according to Aboriginal leaders of the time. He made it clear that

We are very frank in saying that many parents want their children to be educated in the Catholic schools. We must also be frank in saying that our parents now believe that the Catholic schools need more help from Indian people. That is why we propose this partnership.

(49)

In a financial sense, John was requesting that the additional tuition paid by Indian students be used specifically for them. The current situation was that the Aboriginal one-third of the school's population contributed about two-thirds of the school's budget. "Integration" existed only in theory. Public recognition of this injustice marked the beginning of the end of "integration"

at Prince George College. It also seemed to indicate the end of any commitment among the white community towards actual integration in Prince George.

In partial response to this, by the 1980s a number of Aboriginal leaders sat on the Advisory Boards as band representatives (50). Annual reports continued to speak of such achievements as the "Thunderbird Program" and the school's successful Athletic Program (51). And yet, it was also a time of failure. For example, in the same year, Nick Prince, past chief of the Necoslie band and teacher of the Carrier language program, submitted his resignation only months before Bishop O'Grady would retire. Among his reasons for leaving, Prince added that

My reasons are that I do not believe that this program is a benefit to the students; the students show no interest in the language and I do know for a fact that these students will never use the language when only English is spoken at home; the students themselves feel it is useless; and I feel that as long as the parents do not encourage their children, this program will never succeed.

(52)

This reality served to underline the futility of allowing token Dakel'h and Wet'su'weten programs amidst a general curriculum entirely insensitive to Aboriginal history, culture, and spirituality.

By the late 1980s, despite these various token arrangements, it would once again be federal "financial constraints" that would dictate the course of Aboriginal education at Prince George College. Federal parsimony, as indicated by Jean Barman, dictated the course of this education. On March 31, 1987 a letter was sent to all District Managers of the British Columbia Region from the District Superintendent of Education, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs:

You are aware that the department's policy states that a student should attend the school nearest his/her home. Parents who choose to enroll their children in schools other than the ones closest to their homes, must bear any additional costs . . . exceptions must be avoided and eliminated where they do exist. Students who have been placed away from home because of their religious preferences are not eligible for financial support from the Education budget.  
(53)

Aboriginal communities' growing insistence on local control and Ottawa's reluctance to continue to support Aboriginal students at religious educational institutions ended the limited Aboriginal identity of Prince George College.

In 1987 the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Bill McKnight, informed Tribal Chief Edward John of the Carrier-Sekani Tribal Council that despite "a

few exceptions to policy that were made previously by the department" it was now the case that "we are not responsible for extra costs" (54). The federal government, however, claimed it was not limiting Aboriginal parents' right to choose a school for their children. This change in policy signaled the beginning of the end of the Aboriginal presence at Prince George College.

In response to McKnight's letter, the newly consecrated bishop of Prince George, Hubert P. O'Connor borrowed heavily from the paternalistic attitudes of his now-retired predecessor, Bishop O'Grady:

For over 25 years Prince George College has had its doors open to Native and non-Native high school students. It has a very enviable track record, second to none in this country, in graduating Native students from high school. They had a chance to succeed. It is the only facility of its kind in British Columbia we were never consulted about this shift in policy . . . I believe it to be unfair, it is unjust. I invite you to a more open dialogue with the Native peoples of this land as all Government planning and spending will do little more than perpetuate a system that has been with us for generations. (55)

Clearly the Church in Prince George was caught off guard by Ottawa's decision and once again hoped that pushing for a policy of Aboriginal educational self-determination would change the course of events and result in a continuation of

federal funds. Ottawa did not change its mind. While enrollment of Native students continued unchanged during the 1988-1989 school year, Bishop O'Connor wrote to parents of Aboriginal students in the spring of 1989:

Rapidly declining numbers and the decision made in 1987 . . . to discontinue the support payments for Native students has lead us to the troubled position of having to advise you that we must close our residential program at the end of June, 1989. We are grateful to you parents for choosing a Catholic High School. We have tried to do our best in terms of care and education these many years, and we thank you for committing them to us. (56)

By 1989 almost all First Nations families had left the school and the hostels closed.

"Paternalism", together with a sense of cultural and spiritual superiority made "integration" at Prince George College little more than the assimilationist policy advocated by Ottawa and the churches since the nineteenth century. At the same time, the Aboriginal presence at the school ensured the Catholic Church in Prince George a steady flow of funds earmarked for capital projects, tuition, room and board, and transportation of Aboriginal students. This resulted in the subsidization of Catholic secondary education in Prince George by Aboriginal parents for both white and Aboriginal students.

CONCLUSION

O'Grady's Vision  
for Catholic Education  
in Northern British Columbia.

1956 - 2001

The period extending from 1956 to 1989 was a time of "vision" for the late Bishop Fergus O'Grady. His plans to construct a Catholic, integrated secondary and post-secondary institution in the northern Interior of British Columbia was rooted in a long and complex history of Roman Catholic education in the colony and then province of British Columbia. Making use of archival material supplied by the diocese of Prince George, this research has identified the three key elements of O'Grady's "vision" for the school. Throughout the institution's thirty-year history it has been identified as a part of the "tradition" of Oblate history in the West - a heritage successfully manipulated to acquire private and later public financial resources. Until 1993 it was staffed by a large volunteer work force - the Frontier Apostles. This factor, along with the school's "integrated" nature, provided very substantial subsidies for Catholic education across the northern Interior of B.C.

Given the recent and seemingly perennial series of debates surrounding the seemingly economic viability of the only northern Catholic high school in B.C. documenting the efforts to build Prince George College is especially important to me (1). Local Catholic leaders have been debating whether to close the school because of massive

financial difficulties. In fact, as of June 2001, the school closed its doors for the last time. A 1970 report submitted by Winifred Murphy, principal and American Frontier Apostle, had stated that "there appears to have been at one time a clear vision of what the Prince George College mandate was . . . now this philosophy seems less understood and should be redefined or restated" (2). This comment highlights the importance of identity to the school's history - both within the Catholic community and from without as imposed by others. The principal went on to say that the school could potentially "grasp a unique Christian mandate in education", representing a "cultural crossroads" in a "vast, geographic area" with "untapped human resources", an "amazing apostolic network of volunteers" and, as always, the "presence and inspirational leadership of the bishop" (3). No where did Murphy mention the role Aboriginal students played in this mandate despite their importance to Bishop O'Grady and the Oblate community.

Underlying a number of the recent (2001) discussions has been an attempt to re-claim the "vision" of the school believed held by O'Grady. Again, repeating Murphy's comments thirty years ago:

Let us ask ourselves some questions in

Regard to Prince George College in the Hopes of finding some answers that would Justify its existence, its goals, its Values, and its service. (4)

Members of this Catholic community in the region, both in the past and in the present, have been articulating what they see as its essential components. Often this has meant ignoring aspects of the school's history central to Bishop O'Grady's original ambitions, such as an Aboriginal presence or volunteer work force. Ironically, however, this effort at recovery is increasingly done with a certain selective myopia that ignores the historical context and the construction of shifting images and labels over time. In a sense, everyone assumes to know what the school's founder intended.

Current suggestions, however, range from identifying the institution as an "Indian school" on the one hand, to celebrating it as some sort of elite academy serving the exclusive needs of a very select Catholic community in the city. Some commentators wax nostalgic for the so-called "hey days" of "Bishop O'Grady's school" - something remembered as "unique" in its attempts at "educating" and assimilating Native students (5). To add fuel to this rhetoric it was claimed that some of these graduates today occupy significant positions of leadership in educational

institutions, politics, and in law (6). One journalist for the Western Catholic Reporter had previously gone as far as to say that "the forests of British Columbia have a modern Paul Bunyan whose feats would rival anything done by the legendary American hero" (7). Ultimately much of this kind of nostalgia only seems to confuse attempts to understand Bishop O'Grady's plans. At the same time, however, as Huel comments, it can reveal some of the Catholic community's perceptions of the "vision" and "legendary" quality of the man himself.

In more recent discussions this rhetoric revolves around the lack of financial resources to maintain a functioning private secondary school in the North. Little is ever made of Bishop O'Grady's "careful management" of federal funds and "employment of religious personnel" at this "integrated" school that essentially "generated funds" for the school and diocese and "helped to maintain the entire missionary edifice" in northern B.C. While studies indicated that the Oblate community rejected integration in the 1950s and 1960s in favor of denominational-residential schools, Bishop O'Grady became a proud supporter of his own form of integration (8). And yet, little evidence exists to prove integration was ever successful at P.G.C. Instead, current debates about the school's economic

viability conveniently forget that the Aboriginal presence actually subsidized the education of white students for many years. The current lack of funds is not merely an indication of lackluster interest in the school among white Catholic families, as much as the inevitable result of Aboriginal students not attending the institution after 1988 and the demise of the lay volunteer association in 1993.

In the past, massive debts were accumulated in the name of "Catholic education." Today, perhaps because of general disillusionment with parochial education, this motivation no longer exists. For example, in 1983, faced with enormous financial burdens, O'Grady was able to spearhead a successful fundraising campaign by telling the people that "There will be a miracle! We have to find the money!" (9).

My research provides some context for ongoing discussion among EuroCanadian Catholics in Prince George, more particularly by providing insights into Bishop O'Grady's role in constructing the ethos of the school. Recent debates provide a springboard from which to begin discussion of aspects of the school's life from its founding in 1957 to the late 1980s when federal legislation combined with Aboriginal disillusionment with the

missionary-colonialist approach to Aboriginal education finally emptied Prince George College of First Nations students. At about the same time, the use of lay volunteers was in its final days with a growing number of "salaried" professionals. It was no longer logical to expect this workforce to labor for pennies and also subsidize the Catholic education of white youth in Prince George. Bishop O'Grady retired in 1986 after receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of British Columbia for his "pioneering contributions to education in the province"; and in 1989 the school was renamed "O'Grady Catholic High School" in his honour.

Prince George College provides a unique and neglected chapter in B.C.'s educational history and sheds light on the complicated nature of Catholic missionary activity in British Columbia. As an Oblate-created school, it was also part of a long story of assimilation conducted by Christian missionaries on behalf of the federal government to "convert and civilize" Aboriginal youth across Canada. A close examination of three pivotal characteristics of this school during the period from its construction and development in the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s reveals one man's attempts - both successful and unsuccessful - to assist Aboriginal and northern communities and, in

particular, the Catholic community in British Columbia. Yet, if Catholic missionaries believed that they had Natives' "best interests" in mind, their educational work in Canada and their efforts at working with Aboriginal youth were often destructive. O'Grady remains a complex figure who appeared convinced that he was acting in the "best interests" of Aboriginal people. It has, however, been difficult to document any "benevolence", particularly towards local Aboriginal people, because of a dearth of necessary correspondence. His missionary mindset was predicated on the assumption of European spiritual and cultural superiority. An examination of the interplay of the school's "integration" policies, an international volunteer work force, and the context of Catholic, missionary efforts in B.C. contributes to our understanding of the history of schooling in British Columbia. It also serves to underline the success of the late bishop in obtaining funds and a work force, but ultimately failing at integrating Native and white youth.

Although educational historians in British Columbia have begun to recognize the role of residential schools as well as some urban, private educational institutions in the history of schooling, rural, denominational, and "integrated" schools still occupy positions on the margins

of historical research. One such example of a Northern, Catholic, "integrated" school was Prince George College. My having been a student of the school for five years and a student of B.C. educational history, racial relations, and Church history in the Pacific Northwest led me to examine this particular school when, in 1998, it seemed ready to close its doors because of a lack of financial support that started in 1987 with the termination of the residence program, and continued to 1993 when the Frontier Apostolate ended its voluntary subsidization of the school. The school finally collapsed in 2001 with little support from white Catholic families in the city of Prince George.

The school's founder, Fergus O'Grady, successfully manipulated legislation and financially managed to transform a particular narrative of Oblate history in the Pacific Northwest that continued to be predicated on notions of denominational, cultural, and spiritual superiority. It was his goal to create an institution for white and Aboriginal youth, staffed by a volunteer labor force, occupying a distinct place in the larger history of Oblate schooling and missionary work in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest. To this end he reconstructed an ethos of paternalism and denominational supremacy that served to identify Prince George College as an Oblate,

"joint" school under the misnomer of "integration." Narratives and images of the "frontier", the "missionary", the "North", and the "Aboriginal" in relation to schooling shaped how residents of the diocese, political leaders, and the business community perceived the identity and role of Prince George College. O'Grady's ambitions and attitudes were often shared. Others saw the school through the three-fold "vision" he constructed. This allowed the bishop to access financial resources for the building and maintenance of the school as well as to strengthen its unique identity within British Columbia's educational landscape.

Chapter one examined how this "impossibility" was overcome through appealing to images of the "poor Indian", whose religious, cultural, and spiritual "inferiority" made them worthy of a paternalism that ensured generous donations from corporate and private sponsors. Similarly, appeals to images of the region as a frontier of missionary activity created the illusion of a pioneer backwater region with little European or Christian influence.

The second chapter described how these images were applied to the campaign to attract thousands of volunteer labor to staff fourteen Catholic schools, including Prince George College. While local white Catholic families were

attracted to P.G.C. for reasons of denominational and social concerns, the education of their adolescents was subsidized by lay workers who donated their time and energy.

Chapter three analyzed how these familiar images were used to maintain the illusion that true cultural integration was in fact taking place at Prince George College. Federal funds earmarked for Aboriginal education contributed largely to the operation of the school but integration did not follow. The result for Aboriginal students may have been less disastrous than their fate at public schools where few successfully graduated, but was still not the equal education Aboriginal leaders had desired.

With Bishop O'Grady's retirement in 1986 and death in 1998 these perceptions were no longer relevant. It was the start of attempts to model the institution as a Catholic school that increasingly looked to the success of Greater Vancouver's Catholic secondary school system - one never predicated on images similar to Prince George College. Vancouver schools included very few First Nations students, a paid-labor force (or staffed by members of various religious communities), and were often founded by diocesan priests rather than Oblates.

Amidst this time of confusion, political jockeying, and an apparent identity crisis, Fergus O'Grady left public life, having served his term as the bishop of the diocese of Prince George for thirty years. He would, nevertheless, remain a strong presence in the city and the diocese, settling into a decade of semi-retirement from his official duties. His successor, Hubert O'Connor, served the community only a short time, forced to leave in the midst of sexual abuse allegations and conviction at St. Joseph's Residential School in the 1970s. Together with the arrival of Christian Brothers in the mid-1990s, O'Grady's legacy has been permanently illuminated and tainted by these events. Unfortunately, these sad footnotes have left indelible marks on the history of education in the diocese of Prince George.

O'Grady remained a reserved and entirely diplomatic man when it came to discussing the affairs of the diocese, including failed attempts at "integration", the loss of the Frontier Apostles, allegations of physical and sexual abuse at residential and day schools, and the day-to-day activities of the diocese under both Bishop Hubert O'Connor and later, Bishop Gerald Weisner. He chose to remain in the region until his death in 1998. From an Aboriginal perspective, the school was yet another colonial

institution that had been fashioned, established, and administered by "outsiders" with little concern for the traditions and needs of those whom it served.

Today, haunting reminders of this era are few and far between on the campus of O'Grady Catholic High School. The student hostels have become a day care center, private residences, and a Catholic retreat center for adult education. Photographs of earlier graduating classes bare silent testimony to the school's Aboriginal and white student body as well as lay volunteers and members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who once provided leadership and spiritual guidance to the school.

Little else, however, exists as evidence of the days of "integration" and lay voluntarism. A few members of the Frontier Apostles, now fully-salaried professionals, remained at the school in 2001. Among most students, staff, and parents, little is known of the school's early identity and the role of Fergus O'Grady. Nor is there much evidence of his role in constructing an ethos based upon the work of the Oblates, an international voluntary labor force, and the presence of Aboriginal students from 1956 to 1986.

Perhaps the key to realizing a new, "post-O'Grady" educational "vision" at O'Grady Catholic High School is to face up to the disparities and ethnocentrism of the past.

This requires political will and adequate capital and a radical new openness to true "integration" of white and Aboriginal youth in northern British Columbia. This leadership must come from the local level - political leaders, the business community, clergy, and perhaps most importantly, from the lay people and congregations who once followed O'Grady's leadership and built the school.

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This was the problem at All Hallow's in the nineteenth Century as told by Jean Barman. Himself the product Of Irish immigration, O'Grady had been socially Mobile, achieving a seminary education in southern Ontario. Perhaps he could not see the problems that Lay ahead for aboriginal students beyond the "joint" Environment of P.G.C. As I recall, local public schools often saw P.G.C. as the "Indian school" and even mistook its residences for an "Indian reservation." Brawls and fist-fights between aboriginal students and local public school youth were occasionally large enough to merit the presence of the local police in the 1980s when I was a student at P.G.C. The edge of campus was more than the boundary between the school and the larger white community of Prince George. It seemed to be the end of any larger, societal "integration" or "joint" acceptance of aboriginal youth.

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